

# socialist standard

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

## Codes, cataclysms and capitalism

**Why do rational people believe irrational things?**



Michael Sata  
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We're all  
doomed  
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Murder ball  
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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 4 August** 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.**



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JULY 2012

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## Editorial

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### The rational in politics

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SOCIALISTS IN the Marxist tradition used to call themselves 'Scientific Socialists'. This was a way of avoiding associating the theory of socialism with one man, which the term 'Marxist' fails to do. But it meant more than this. It meant the application of the scientific method to the question of working class emancipation as well as to the world in general.

But what is the scientific method? It is a method of understanding the world based on first observing and recording experience and then analysing it and looking for correlations; then suggesting a cause and, finally, repeatedly testing this hypothesis against further observations until it can be said to a reliable guide to future experience.

Humans have always applied this to the production from nature of what they need. They have always been practical materialists here. It's the only way that the knowledge of how to improve methods of production, which has gone on throughout history, could have increased. Science is the more systematic and more consistent application of this approach.

The application of the scientific method to the study of the world around us has led to the rejection of the idea of the intervention, or even the existence, of 'super-natural' beings such as gods or a single God. This brings science into conflict with religion. But not just religion. Religion, with its ancient texts and dogmatic insistence on such things as the resurrection of the dead or the reincarnation of souls, is an easy target. In the attempt to explain the world around us, it has been replaced by beliefs in the operation of equally mysterious but impersonal forces. Such pseudo-scientific, "paranormal" beliefs are now fairly widespread.

Believers in such forces don't base their theories on sacred texts. They claim to accept and apply the scientific method and to offer an alternative scientific explanation of the same phenomena that science does. The problem is that, although they do observe and record experiences, analyse them for correlations and propose hypotheses for testing, they proclaim that their hypotheses have been proved despite their not having met the conditions for this. If these hypotheses could be verified then they would be incorporated into the general body of scientific knowledge: they would cease to be paranormal and become normal. In fact, there's surely a Nobel Prize waiting for anyone who can prove that psychokinesis or ley lines or qi exist.

In the field of politics and economics, the idea of divine intervention has been replaced by that of secret human intervention – conspiracy theories, the conspirators varying from the Illuminati and the Elders of Zion to the Bildeberg group and international bankers. This is another case of drawing an unwarranted conclusion from observed facts. Under capitalism we really are dominated by the impersonal force that is the Market. Some people, sensing that they are dominated by something they can't control, wrongly attribute this to the deliberate actions of some shadowy group.

This is not to say that under capitalism scientists are completely objective. Capitalism suborns everything to commercial interests, including science. Money can buy a scientist as a hired gun to promote a hypothesis favourable to the buyer or rubbish one that is not. Only the non-commercial society that socialism will be can free science and scientists from such perversions.





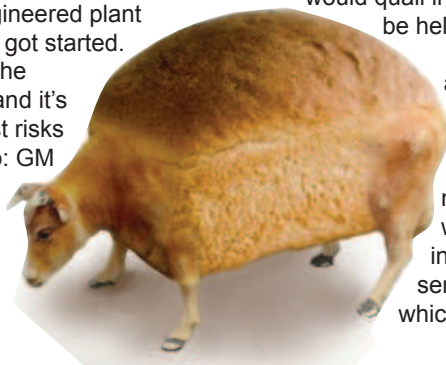
## Wheat on trial

THE WHOLE GM debate has reared its ugly hydra heads again, after a recent showdown at a field near Harpenden where researchers faced protesters across the massed ranks of Hertfordshire Constabulary in order to decide the fate of a field of experimental aphid-busting GM wheat. The protesters had announced their intention of ‘decontaminating’ the field, ie launching a guerrilla raid to pull up the crop. Dismayed, the boffins called in the Plod. The crop was then trampled underfoot anyway by a stampede of press reporters smelling a good story.

Both sides have websites detailing their arguments, and both sides claim to be using evidence-based reasoning. So who’s right? On the one hand the protestors can point to large-scale popular opposition to ‘untested’ GM technology, not just in the UK but across Europe, which fact alone may lend their guerrilla strategy somewhat more legitimacy than it would otherwise have. But whether this opposition is informed or simply knee-jerk is a moot question. The scientists can point to large-scale GM use in America and China, with no major disasters reported.

A quick and dirty summation of the arguments goes something like this. Pro: engineering crop species to give off an aphid repellent will reduce the use of harmful pesticides by farmers. In fact recent research coming out of China suggests it will even reduce pesticide use in neighbouring crops, as pest predators proliferate and gobble up every last bug (*New Scientist*, 16 June). Con: it might do so in the short term, but there is no scientific consensus for this. In the longer term it is just as likely to create more pests, or new pests, or super-pests through resistance. Pro: this is independent, non-profit research conducted properly and in the best interests of knowledge and human wellbeing. Con: maybe, but the big agro-chemical companies are waiting in the wings, ready to make huge profits, and they are the ones really calling the tune. Pro: how can we test new strains when you go around pulling up crops and then complaining that our new strains are untested? Con: you can test them all you want, just do it indoors and out of harm’s way. Pro: you don’t have the right to pull up crops unilaterally. Con: you don’t have the right to plant them either. Pro: you say you want a public debate, but you turned one down when we offered it. Con: you only gave us seven days to get the speakers! We want a debate, but not entirely on your terms. Pro: humans have always genetically engineered plant species – it’s how the Neolithic revolution got started. Con: selective crop breeding is not at all the same thing as direct gene manipulation, and it’s disingenuous to pretend it is. Anyway past risks don’t automatically justify future risks. Pro: GM technology could be a huge boon for the future of human food supplies. Just what are you so afraid of? Con: that depends. What have you got?

Considering what else is going on in the world right now, this little dispute



seems like something of a sideshow. As the rest of this issue of the Socialist Standard makes plain, socialists are interested in science and the scientific method, so to us destroying research feels rather akin to book-burning, even if it is just a publicity stunt. If GM technology works, and it seems to, we’ll need to use it in socialism. The protestors might have a point about the corporations who are standing by ready to invest, and whose interests can be expected to trump those of the general population, but this is a political objection not a scientific one.

In fact the whole dispute is best understood as a political rather than a scientific argument. Much is made of the fact that the modified gene is described by the researchers as ‘most similar to a cow’s’. This has given the protest organisers priceless ammunition. They probably know that it is essentially meaningless, given that humans share around 25 percent of their genes with daffodils, but they will be relying on their less savvy supporters to have a knee-jerk ‘Yuk’ reaction.

The argument that the test won’t work is illogical and frankly silly, since no test will work if it isn’t run and science does not proceed by presupposing success.

The much vaunted fear that ‘something might get out’ into the environment is vague at best. Even if other local plant species began to acquire aphid-repellent properties by horizontal gene transfer, it doesn’t seem likely that this would result in a wholesale collapse of the food chain, and it hasn’t happened anywhere else.



As for the resistance problem and the possible creation of super-aphids, we face that anyway with conventional pesticides or indeed any conceivable anti-pest strategy. That’s the nature of evolution, and we’re not about to find a permanent get-out clause for that.

What the protestors really seem to dislike is the idea that some faceless bureaucrat from DEFRA can foist something onto them without their agreement. This is not really about the science, it’s about local people wanting to preserve the agreeable fiction that they are the ones in control of their own environment. As with anti-road lobbies and all manner of other Nimby single-issues, the gut objection to being put upon is not felt to be enough to persuade others, so it is tricked out in scientific fancy dress and rolled out for public consumption in the press, where predictable prejudices can be brought into play. Wherever an institutional project is set up, the locality immediately sprouts a bumper crop of self-taught architects, wind-energy enthusiasts, road transport analysts, climatologists, radiation-related disease specialists and, as here, farmyard genetic engineers. If the UK really had this level of latent expertise in every shire and every village, China and the USA would quail in terror and the annual Nobel ceremony would be held in Tunbridge Wells.

Not that local objectors to government projects are necessarily wrong in feeling put upon.

They are being put upon. But so are we all, every day, when we have the capitalist system foisted on us, a system which takes but does not give, which shouts but does not listen, and which elevates a fat, greedy micro-class to indolent luxury while we slave and rot in their service. That is the real problem, compared to which local disputes about GM wheat are just chaff.

Free

Dear Editors  
 Pathfinders (June 2012) writes the concept of free access seems to be extending and that the ubiquity of online delivery is normalising free access, a quiet revolution in which charging money for important and socially useful things begins to be seen as selfish. This assessment is too optimistic, although intellectual property generally has never had much popular support. In the computer industry the trend is certainly more mixed to say the least and has been the case throughout personal computer history. Political action will be necessary to effectively uphold popular demand and combat the en-

croachments of property by the powerful in the same way the commons were enclosed in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

**Darrell Whitehead** (by email)

Greece

Dear Editors  
 On reading this article I was taken back to my visit to Athens in January this year. I saw people going through the wheely bins of rubbish for something of value, the graffiti “profit = theft” daubed on walls, the shuttered shops, and the massive sale reductions of 75% off products. I was particularly struck by the busker singing The Beatles song, ‘Yesterday’, whose lyrics are very apt for the Greek situation (“all my troubles seemed so far away and now they are here to stay”).

I was shocked by ‘needle park’ near the chic district of Kolonaki where young people were openly in daylight “shooting up” drugs. At the main railway station I discovered that all international train movements had ceased. The infrastructure projects started in the halcyon days after Greece adopted the Euro, after the Athens Olympics and the glory that was Greece winning the football Euro 2004 had been halted. A telling sign was the abandonment of extensions to the main Athens railway station, overhead electrification had stopped mid-way and the Krupp-Thyssen escalator mechanisms still in their plastic coverings on pallets lying in the yard. The Greek Tragedy is capitalism in crisis.

**Steve Clayton, London SW8**

## Zambia: tribalism versus class

In 1994, in one hundred days only, about one million people were killed in Rwanda by members of another tribe in what appeared to be a well-calculated and planned genocide.

More or less, the genocide in Rwanda was instigated by men of the collar – men who prior to the genocide were preaching against such conduct.

When one human being or group views another as the reason for their poverty the persons in the other group become a target for elimination or intimidation as the case may be. In the midst of squalor and poverty people start to agitate for a change of government. The workers start to agitate for an improvement in their living conditions and often with surprising fervour, as if possessed. During such times they exhibit an urgency for change – that can easily take a violent form.

It is during such times that some populist and charismatic politicians emerge and take advantage of the situation – telling one group of workers that their lack of prosperity is the result of selfishness of another group or tribe. What follows then is not class action – but genocide.

In Zambia today there is real and perceived class discontent among the urbanised populations. Because of widespread unemployment and shoddy working conditions many workers tend to look at Chinese and Indian investors (employers) with suspicion. There is a growing perception or feeling among the urbanised workers that the Chinese investors are the cause of their poverty. It has been alleged before by Patriotic Front leader Michael Sata that the Chinese are prospering at the expense of Zambian workers. Before he became President he had even threatened to expel them.

Sadly in Zambia today there is a growing feeling among the opposition that the PF government is being tribalistic in the sense that PF leader Michael Sata has appointed Bemba-speaking politicians to ministerial positions regardless of their political affiliations. It is alleged that the

Ministry of Finance is now controlled by members of Sata’s family. The finance minister Alexander Chikwanda (Sata’s uncle), his deputy Miles Sampa (Sata’s nephew) and secretary to the treasury Fredson Yamba (Sata’s brother in marriage) all belong to one family – that of President Michael Sata. Accusations of nepotism are difficult to dispel when such instances are cited.

Thus we can conclude that in Zambia, too, working class economic and political grievances are being hijacked by politicians who take advantage of social inequalities to instigate tribal and racial identities. The Chinese and Indian communities are walking a tight rope in Zambia today. These communities clearly keep themselves apart from indigenous Zambians. This can easily be inflamed into racial hatred and antagonism.

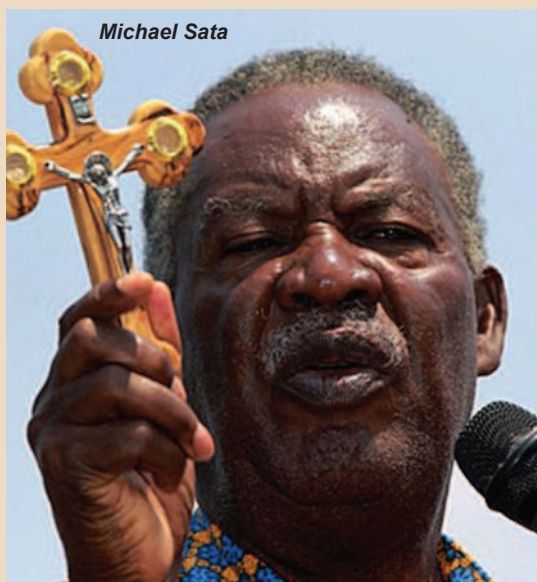
One other incident that exemplifies tribalism in Zambia today was the recently inaugurated Barotse Kingdom by some fanatical members of the Barotse Royal Establishment. This was a fatuous proclamation of an independent Barotse political state with Zambia – but the ruling PF government has lent a deaf ear.

The first republican president, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, had a better understanding of ethnic and tribal political loyalties that exist in Zambia. Kaunda was not in error to openly practice tribal balancing when appointing politicians to high offices of the one-party UNIP.

We can conclude that in many poor and less developed nations, working class political consciousness as a precondition for social change does not exist and that politicians can easily take advantage of working class social grievances to lure them into ethnic and tribal animosities.

This remains the case in Zambia today. Log on to Socialism to understand how we live and how we can change the way we live.

**KEPHAS MULENGA,  
 KITWE, ZAMBIA**







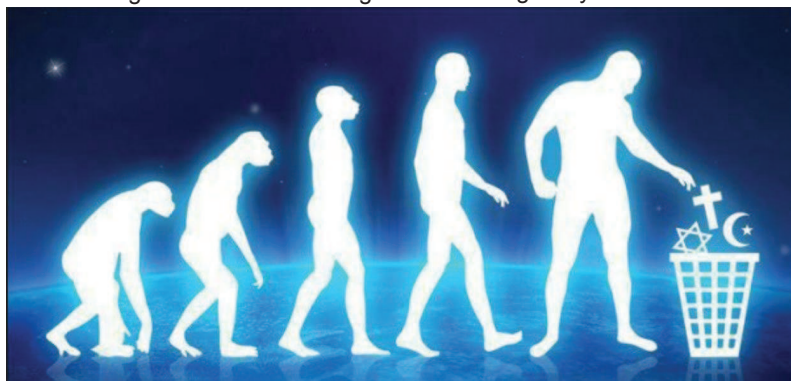
## Beyond Belief

ACCORDING to a Gallup Poll announced in June, forty-six percent of Americans believe that 'God created humans in their present form within the last 10,000 years'. Only fifteen percent accepted that humans had evolved without God's intervention. On the face of it these are alarming statistics, particularly since on the 11 occasions the polls have dealt with this subject since 1982 the results appear to have been remarkably consistent. The 1982 figure for the creationist view was forty-four percent.

This prompted an article in the *New Yorker* (7 June, 2012) asking, or rather telling us, 'Why We Don't Believe in Science' and suggesting that 'we come equipped with all sorts of naïve intuitions about the world'. That we have to 'unlearn' our 'instincts' and that 'primal belief lingers in the mind'.

It's true of course that from an early age we are bombarded with false values, not just religious ideas but, about our place in a class-divided society. And that we have to 'unlearn' this nonsense before we can understand our true potential as human beings. But there is nothing natural about holding these views. We believe in them because that is what we are taught. They are the dominant ideas in capitalist society.

The title of the article too, 'Why We Don't Believe in Science,' is confusing. Science is not about 'belief'. Unlike religion,



science concerns itself with provable, tried and tested data and facts.

The statements the poll asked its participants to choose from were loaded. It asked:

"Which of the following statements comes closest to your views on the origin and development of human beings?"

1. Human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided the process.
2. Human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God had no part in the process.
3. God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years.

Although statement 2 leaves God out of human evolution, it doesn't discount him altogether. It suggests that he may be lurking in the background, waiting to perform his latest miracle perhaps, or maybe still resting after his six days of creation.

The Rev Michael Dowd who rather confusingly describes himself as a 'religious naturalist', an 'evidential mystic' and a 'big history evangelist' doesn't like the three choices on offer either. Trying to square his religious confusion with reality he would like to see a fourth choice.

'Human beings emerged naturally from a long process of physical and biological creativity that can be spoken of religiously as 'God's creation' or scientifically as 'evolution'.'

Well no. Ideas about the 'physical and biological creativity' of a supernatural being should only be spoken of as religious nonsense. And if there's one thing we don't need in the twenty-first century it's yet more mythological mumbo jumbo or 'evidential mysticism', whatever that is, trying to pass itself off as science.

**NW**

## Brief Reports

DAVID CAMERON has announced he wants to cut housing benefit for people under 25, in order to reduce the welfare bill. In an interview in the *Mail on Sunday*, the Prime Minister said he wanted to stop those who were working from feeling resentment towards workshy and parasitical loafers who relied on a something for nothing culture. He added: 'We've got enough of those in the House of Lords'.

POLICE MINISTER Nick Herbert has used parliamentary privilege to name an undercover police officer who allegedly planted a fire bomb at a London department store in 1987. He said: 'Undercover operations are sometimes necessary to protect the public. I think we should commend the difficult job performed by our undercover officers. Sometimes they have to step outside the law in order to frame the right people. Without their sterling work, some innocent people who deserve to be put away might get off scott free.'

LOW-PAID WORKERS who take strike action will no longer be able to claim working tax credits. The Work and Pensions Minister Ian Duncan Smith says the fact that the current benefit system compensates workers and tops up their income when they go on strike is 'unfair and creates perverse incentives to defend their pay.' He added: 'The current benefit system is an expensive mess anyway. We're aiming to replace the whole thing with a single universal benefit that nobody gets.'

THE ROMAN Catholic Church has dismissed a poll suggesting the majority of Scots support same-sex marriage. A church spokesman said asking whether people support the right to do something solicits a positive response: 'The gay lobby is clearly biased. When we do our polls we ask people if they think godless poofers destined for hellfire should be allowed to abolish our most precious institutions, and we tend to get the answer no.'

MANY PEOPLE in their fifties appear to be planning to work past the current state pension age (SPA) of 65, research suggests. The number of people working beyond the SPA has almost doubled since 1993, to stand at 1.41 million in 2011. A spokesman for the CBI said: 'The business community fully supports people's right to work until they drop. Pensions are derisory anyway. It's much cheaper for people to be carried out of the factory gates and into the knackers' yard.'

WIKILEAKS FOUNDER Julian Assange is requesting political asylum in Ecuador, the country's foreign minister has said. Mr Assange is facing extradition to Sweden as a first step to rendition to the United States. He was previously offered asylum in Greece but turned it down. 'You must be joking. I'd rather be in GuantanamoWWWo. At least they've got food there', he was reported to have said.

## It wasn't socialism

COMMENTING ON multi-millionaire and Tory backwoodsman Adrian Beecroft's description of LibDem Cabinet Minister Vince Cable as a "socialist" for criticising his proposal to make it easier for employers to sack workers, Owen Jones asked "How did 'socialist' turn into an insult?" (*I newspaper*, 25 May).

It's a question we ourselves have often asked. Our answer has been that it's because the word became associated with the Labour Party and the state capitalist dictatorship in the old USSR.

Although we consistently opposed both, we were unable to keep to the fore the original meaning of 'socialism' as a co-operative commonwealth based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production, with production for use, not the market or profit, and the end of having to work for wages. Both Labour and the Russian dictatorship failed and people were encouraged to see this as the failure of socialism.

The early Labour Party's claim was that, by a series of nationalisations and social reforms, a Labour government would be able to gradually improve workers' living standards and progress towards socialism (which some of them understood in the same, original sense as us). It didn't work out that way. In office, Labour had to govern capitalism on capitalism's terms, as a profit-making system. This inevitably brought them into conflict with workers and to introduce wage restraint and restrictions on union activity.

The post-war Labour government did nationalise coal, the railways, gas, water and electricity but mainly in order to ensure that the rest of private industry got these provided in a more efficient (and subsidised) way. It also introduced a nation-wide social insurance system and health service, once again mainly to benefit employers by providing them with a relatively healthy and more productive workforce.

Although working conditions in the industries that were nationalised did improve, the basic conflict of interest between workers and employers that is built-in to capitalism continued, and so, therefore, did strikes. An economic crisis (and the need to finance a war in Korea) forced the post-war Labour government itself to begin the whittling away of some of the social reforms it had introduced. The same happened with the Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s.

Instead of Labour gradually transforming capitalism, it was capitalism that gradually transformed Labour, from a party that talked of socialism even if only as a vague and long-term aspiration into an alternative management team for British Capitalism plc.

Jones noted that the word 'socialism' "hasn't made an appearance in a Labour manifesto since 1987." But he doesn't want to return to the original meaning but only to what the Labour Party used to mean by it years ago. "If socialists really were running the show in Britain", he wrote, the banks "would be taken under genuine democratic control, forcing them to operate in the interests of society as a whole"; the rich would be forced to pay more tax; the railways and energy companies would be taken into "social ownership" and run by workers and consumers; more social housing would be built, and a "living wage" introduced.

This is Old Labour stuff – the dream of a democratically-run wages and profits system (which, ironically, Vince Cable shared when he was a Labour councillor in Glasgow in the 1970s before following the Gang of Four into the SDP and then the Liberals).

There was nothing wrong with the sentiment behind this of wanting to provide workers with a decent and improving standard of living. It's just that, given capitalism, this is not possible. Capitalism simply cannot be made to work in the interest of workers.

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# Protests in Russia: for democracy or just against Putin?



IN LATE 2011 moderately large-scale protests broke out in Russia directed against election fraud in particular and, more generally, against the increasingly authoritarian regime of Vladimir Putin. (Putin remained the regime's dominant figure even when he was taking his turn as prime minister and Dmitry Medvedev

kept the presidential seat warm for him.) The protests continue, but on a smaller scale, despite repressive measures adopted after Putin's inauguration for his third term as president.

It is clear what, or to be more precise, who, the protest movement is against. But what is it for? On May 18 a critical assessment of the movement appeared on the website of the Confederation of Revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalists, the Russian section of the International Workers' Association (<http://aitrus.info/node/2171>). An English-language version can be found here (<http://stephenshenfield.net/places/russia/current-politics>).

The author of the assessment, who identifies himself only by the initials V.G., first warns against exaggerating the size of the protests. Even at their height, there were "at most a few tens of thousands" of demonstrators in Moscow, while those in provincial cities were numbered in the hundreds or low thousands. "The overwhelming majority of the population have observed the latest round in the struggle for political power with complete indifference." And they are right, he adds: the interests of working people are not at stake.

## Occupy Abai

The protestors called their movement Occupy Abai in an attempt to create a resemblance to Occupy Wall Street. 'Abai' refers to a statue of the nineteenth-century Kazakh poet Abai Kunanbayev in Pure Ponds (Chistye Prudy) Park, close to where the protestors set up a camp, which has now been broken up by the police.

As V.G. points out, any resemblance to Occupy Wall Street is superficial – one of style and organizational structure only, and not political content. The protests in Western Europe and the United States give voice to social and economic grievances directed against the greed of banks and corporations. Most of the Russian protestors just want a "Russia without Putin". All sorts of political groups are involved in the movement, but 'bourgeois liberals' occupy the pivotal position. Other tendencies: leftists, anarchists, nationalists, etc; provide ballast, making the opposition look like a mass movement.

In V.G.'s view, the confrontation is a power struggle between, politicians and capitalists that have close

ties with the regime, and those that do not. Among the outsiders one of the most important is Mikhail Prokhorov, a tycoon ('oligarch') who stood for president against Putin and did quite well in Moscow, where he outflanked Gennady Zyuganov, candidate of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. According to Forbes magazine, Prokhorov, who has interests in technology, mining, banking and insurance, is worth \$18 billion, making him the third richest man in Russia and the thirty-second richest in the world. In his election campaign he openly called for revisions to the Labour Code that would abolish restrictions on working hours, deregulate overtime pay and make it easier for employers to dismiss people.

## Democrats and others

Can we say that whatever the economic interests behind the opposition, it is at least a movement for democracy? Opposition to a specific authoritarian regime cannot automatically be equated with support for democracy. This applies especially to countries like Russia with weak democratic traditions. Consider, for instance, the mass movement in Iran that replaced the Shah's dictatorship by the rule of the ayatollahs.

Some of the many political groups that make up the anti-Putin movement are committed to democracy; others are not. There are two major and overlapping anti-democratic tendencies: those 'leftists' who still hope to restore some variant of the Leninist (Soviet) system, and the Russian nationalists and neo-fascists.

At the beginning of 2012 a "civic council" was formed to represent the protest movement. Equal numbers of seats were allocated to three categories of organization – liberals, leftists and nationalists. Considering that only some leftists and not necessarily all liberals can be regarded as democrats, it is doubtful whether democrats constitute a majority on this council.

## A shameful tragicomedy

At first some leftists and human rights activists objected to the participation of Russian nationalists in the movement but found themselves in a small minority on the issue. The main counter-argument was that excluding anyone would weaken the movement and make it harder to achieve the common goal – getting rid of Putin. The Russian nationalists made it very clear that they were not going anywhere.

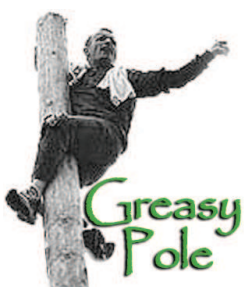
V.G. is especially scathing about fellow anarchists and former 'anti-fascist' activists who are now willing to cooperate with neo-fascists. He calls it "a shameful tragicomedy". They should have kicked up a big fuss, he says, and declared that unless the nationalists went they would go themselves ("either them or us").

Some of the campers in Pure Ponds Park moved a resolution to stop ethnic hate propaganda being distributed in the camp. The resolution was not even accepted for discussion. In fact, nationalist thugs were entrusted with the job of guarding the camp and enforcing the camp rules. (Many young nationalists earn a living as bodyguards and security men.) Can you imagine Nazis 'guarding' the camp of Occupy Wall Street? V.G. asks sarcastically?

"The anti-Putin movement," V.G. concludes, "is just as reactionary ... as the Putin regime. Real anarchists and leftists ... do not want to choose the lesser of these evils."

**STEFAN**



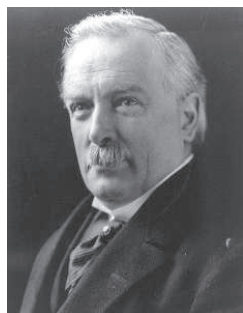


# 1922 And All That

AS DAVID Cameron never forgets to remind us, when he eventually bargained his way into the top job at Number Ten, he was confronted with a block of problems so huge and urgent that only someone of his unique analytical and curative powers could be relied on to demolish it. Especially demanding was the matter of the arrangement that had smoothed his way to success – the coalition agreement with Nick Clegg and his floundering Liberal Democrats. How would MPs of both parties view the adjustments, the compromises and the back-tracking which the agreement demanded of them? Pondering on these matters, Cameron would have had to think about the 1922 Committee – a kind of parliamentary shop-stewards organisation which allowed backbench MPs to express their opinions about, and thereby influence, government policy. There was reason for him to be uneasy about tackling the 1922 on this issue for the precedents were not encouraging.

## Welsh Goat

The committee arose in October 1922 from a meeting of all Conservative MPs at London's Carlton Club, whose interior was not intimately known to the millions who had voted in the 1918 coupon election for the wartime coalition of Conservatives and Lloyd George's Liberals. But the stresses of struggling to control the capitalist system, rampant in its chaos after World War One, had forced division between the two parties. The Cabinet hoped that the meeting would bring about what they regarded as unity, but Stanley



Goat

Baldwin announced that if the Coalition contested an election he would stand as an Independent Conservative. Without actually naming Lloyd George as his principal rival in the leadership stakes, he elaborated that the 'Welsh goat' (a nickname in salute to his extravagant sexual activity) was also 'a dynamic force' and that such a thing could be 'a terrible thing' for its destructive qualities – in the case of the Liberal Party, for example. After a succession of speakers revealed that their experience of political power had not qualified them as any less confused and irrelevant, the meeting voted firmly to fight the coming election as an independent party with its own leader and programme. Lloyd George had to resign and soon afterwards Stanley Baldwin led the Conservatives to defeat in the 1923 election. And from that shambles there emerged the 1922 Committee.

## Duncan Smith

It did not take long for the 1922 to equip itself, like any bunch of effective shop stewards, with a reputation as the bane of the leadership – which, if not strictly accurate, was not unwelcome to them. There is the case of Iain Duncan Smith (known as IDS) who was the Tory party leader between September 2001 and October 2003 in succession to the blundering William Hague. IDS quickly showed himself to be cruelly out of his depth in so demanding a job and he was not helped when a TV programme in 2002 revealed that he had not been as truthful as an aspiring leader should be in his account



Baldwin

of his higher education. His call for the party to unite behind him was blatantly at variance with his own record of persistently opposing Prime Minister John Major (who described him as one of a set of 'bastards'). Early in 2003 there was a campaign to remove him, and the 1922 became the rallying point to receive the necessary written demands for a vote of no confidence in him. IDS resisted to the bitter end but the Tory party moved on to the equally disastrous leadership of Michael Howard. As a final irony IDS has taken to informing us that after all the politicians' blathering about abolishing poverty, it still disfigures the country and also (as an ex-officer) to advocating the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan to fight an indefinite war in Iraq.

## Cantankerous

When Cameron became Prime Minister he quickly made it clear that one of his priorities was to deal with (i.e. to control) the 1922. In May 2010, before he had even announced the terms of the coalition agreement with the Lib-Dems, he tried to impose a change of the 1922 rules which would have allowed front benchers – ministers and the like – to become members. This was met with emphatic refusal. A 'senior MP' described the proposal as '...a stitch-up the Mafia would be proud of' while Margaret Thatcher's ex-hatchet man Lord Tebbit raged that it was '...quite disgraceful, totally improper...'. But this was new life for the Tories, back in power after 13 years in the wilderness; the changes were agreed except that the ministers would not be able vote for the 1922 officers or executive committee. Cameron's case for the changes was partly that the committee was under the control of some MPs who, even by the standards of Westminster, could be seen as eccentric. In April this year, the 301 group, who aim to reform 1922 out of all recognition, condemned them as 'a group of mostly cantankerous old farts who do little to further right-wing ideas'. (Although, on the subject of eccentricity, it should be noted that a prominent member of the 301 group, Priti Patel, is in favour of the death penalty as a deterrent to crime and was unwise enough to insist on the point even after evidence that an innocent person had recently been executed).

## The People

Is there anything to be learned from considering the parallels between the events that took place when the 1922 Committee was formed and those of this year when the Tory leader planned effectively to abolish it? The original assumption was that as backbench, run-of-the-mill, salt-of-the-earth MPs are elected by popular vote, their voice should be heard and responded to as the Will of the People. There would be more force in that argument if The People always spoke up in the interests of a humane society. But that is too rarely heard – and if it is heard it is disregarded as fantastic. So what we are assumed to accept as normal life – the arrangement whereby one class exploits and dominates the other – runs on and on. It was ninety years ago when Baldwin and Lloyd George clashed, but in any fundamental sense nothing has changed.

## IVAN

# Barack Hussein Obama is a secret Muslim stealth Socialist born in Kenya!!!

(and other frightening tales)

*With policy differences between Democrats and Republicans negligible, a good conspiracy theory comes in handy at election time.*

If politics and policy were synonymous, the voters who loyally backed the Bush administration over eight years might as well support Barack Obama in the upcoming presidential election. His first four years in office have demonstrated that he can deliver the same basic policies as the Bush years (the military adventures overseas, the bailouts for investment banks, the cuts in social programs, the chipping away at constitutional rights, and so on), with the added benefit of no protesting peeps from liberals.

But politics is about more than policy, of course. For individual politicians, it all comes down to getting elected. This requires 'brand differentiation' – setting oneself apart from the other guy. Politics may at times make for strange bedfellows, but more often it thwarts a loving embrace between those with much in common. And so Republicans must exaggerate their policy differences with the Obama administration for the sake of their election campaign.

But that's not enough. Precisely because the difference in policy is so thin, the campaign must also be seasoned heavily with personal attacks. The task is to convince voters that Obama is a terrible menace to society, requiring an Internet-age whispering campaign in which conspiracy theory plays a prominent role.

## Your lying eyes

Some Americans may need no more evidence than the colour of Obama's skin to doubt his capacities. But outright racism is not exactly socially acceptable these days, at least in a public forum. What *does* still have wide currency, in Republican circles and beyond, is xenophobia. And this fear of the Other is a central theme of the imaginative efforts to personally discredit Obama.

Instead of reminding voters, with a

wink and a nudge, that the president is black, conspiracy theorists are trying to build their anti-Obama case around the fact that he's *Barack* – a 'secret Muslim' born in Kenya. If either half of the theory were true, the Republicans would have hit the jackpot, because Muslims remain an acceptable scapegoat among many Americans

and only 'natural-born citizens' of the United States are eligible to run for president.

Rumours that Obama, the son of a Kenyan, was born outside the United States began to percolate during the presidential primaries in 2008, and the Hillary Clinton campaign was happy to benefit from the rumours or even help to spread them. The rising controversy led Obama that year to release a certified copy from the Hawaii Department of Health of the "short form" of his birth certificate.

But that only stirred up even more speculation among conspiracy theorists, who claimed it was a forgery. These 'birthers' continued to demand that Hawaii provide clearer proof that Obama



100 percent authentic - the picture they don't want you to see...

had been born there. And some states even called for such proof in order for Obama to be eligible on their ballots. Bombarded by these requests, Hawaii in April 2011 decided to waive its policy of only issuing the short form and release a certified copy of the long-form Certificate of Live Birth.

This has quieted the controversy somewhat, but die-hard birthers remain unconvinced that the second document is based on actual fact. And not all of these skeptics are on the lunatic fringe of the Republican Party. As recently as May of this year, Donald Trump (who is a lunatic, but not on the fringe), said in a CNN interview, "A lot of people think [the birth certificate] is not authentic," and he suggested that Obama's parents may



have filed a US birth announcement in Hawaiian newspapers for his overseas birth. Trump made these comments on the very day he helped raise \$2 million for the Romney campaign.

Romney does not endorse the birther conspiracy theory, but he can't say too bluntly that supporters like Trump have crossed the line separating bullshit from batshit. Romney doesn't want to alienate the Tea Party movement, where birthers and other conspiracy theorists are welcome.

### Jihad over Jesus

The other conspiracy theory that Republicans politicians are wary to embrace too tightly, even though they benefit from it, is that 'Obama is a secret Muslim.' This rumour has spread mainly through e-mail. At the beginning of 2007, around the time the right-wing magazine *Insight* 'broke' the story, the following e-mail was widely forwarded among rank-and-file Republicans:

"Obama takes great care to conceal the fact that he is a Muslim . . . Lolo Soetoro, the second husband of Obama's mother . . . introduced his stepson to Islam. Osama [sic!] was enrolled in a Wahabi school in Jakarta. Wahabism is the radical teaching that is followed by the Muslim terrorists who are now waging Jihad against the western world. Since it is politically expedient to be a Christian when seeking major public office in the United States, Barack Hussein Obama has joined the United Church of Christ in an attempt to downplay his Muslim background."

This e-mail contains the crux of the claim that Obama is a secret Muslim. Other cute flourishes added to the theory include the rumour that he was sworn into the US Senate on the Koran rather than the Bible, and that he will not recite the pledge of allegiance or show reverence for the US flag.

Like any conspiracy theory, this one is concocted by mixing facts, speculation, and outrageous lies. It is true that Obama's stepfather was, at least nominally, a Muslim. But the claim that "O[b]ama was enrolled in a Wahabi school" is a lie; in fact, he attended an ordinary Indonesian public school (and later a Catholic school).

What's interesting about the theory is not its content but that millions of Republicans find it (at least somewhat) convincing. It attests to the paranoia and

bigotry that runs through the ranks of the party, and the extent to which the party leaders must tap into this ignorance to get elected.

### The company he keeps

Another horrible secret the president is keeping from the American people, say the Republicans in unison, is that he's a *socialist*.

Of course, Republicans have been labelling opponents "socialists" since the 1990s, when it dawned on them that "liberal" had been worn too thin from overuse to serve as a choice insult. (How the limp creed of liberalism could have ever frightened anyone is a great mystery of American political life.)

The insult has changed but not the meaning: a socialist, like the once dreaded liberal, is someone who advocates "big government" (i.e. the modern welfare state, Keynesian economic policies, etc.). Socialism, under this commonly held view, is a society in which the "free market" is fettered – *not* a society where markets and money no longer exist.

But even when 'socialist' is just another word for liberal, and 'socialism' but a specific form of capitalism, Barack Obama still doesn't stack up to much of a socialist. There are only a few examples of Obama's "radical" (big government) policies that the Republicans can point to, such as the bailout of General Motors and support for the failed company Solyndra. And these have nothing to distinguish them from similar policies implemented by past administrations of either party. Even his health care reform, denounced as "socialized medicine"

by Republicans, is premised on the continued existence of private insurance companies.

If Obama's policies as president are socialistic, then every US president since FDR has dabbed in a bit of socialism. Republicans must know that the "Obama is a socialist" claim cannot be made on the basis of what he's done in office. They have no choice but to turn from policy to conspiracy.

Having found so few juicy titbits from Obama's first term in office, Republican conspiracy theorists have been sifting through his past, way back to his college days, looking for any sort of connection to radical individuals and organizations. Dozens of books have already appeared with the findings of this research, invariably published a few months before an election.

The authors all seem to conclude, regardless of their specific topic, that Obama is somehow alien to American political life, a sort of secret agent who has weaselled his way into the centre of power. The books are written to stoke readers' paranoia and have titles like, *Barack Obama and the Enemies Within* or *The Secret Life of Barack Hussein Obama*.

"HE ISN'T WHAT HE SEEMS" – warns the back cover of *The Manchurian President: Barack Obama's Ties to Communists, Socialists and Other Anti-American Extremists*; a book that promises to present "chilling findings" about "how dangerous Barack Obama really is." These findings include: "Obama's deep ties to anti-American fringe nexus [?] instrumental in building his political career"; the existence of



“extremists . . . in the White House . . . including communist-linked Valery Jarrett and David Axelrod”; and Obama’s extensive “ties to terrorist Bill Ayers.”

*Radical-in-Chief: The Untold Story of American Socialism*, apparently one of the more respectable contributions to the genre, offers a similar list of revelations. Along with the *de rigueur* obsessing about links to Bill Ayers, the book reveals, “Obama’s long association with an organizer training institute called the Midwest Academy – whose archives reveal it to be a classic socialist front group,” and recounts how “Obama’s life was changed forever when . . . he attended his first of many ‘Socialist Scholars Conferences’ in New York” where he “discovered community organizing and its stealth-socialist agenda.” (Quotes are taken from conservativebookclub.com.)

This might sound convincing to some readers, at least those who have never attended something like a Socialist Scholars Conference. But I wonder how many young people, after sitting through a left-wing academic presentation, would describe the experience as *life-changing*?

### Apocalypse now (again)

“Armageddon is a triennial festival,” the critic Dwight MacDonald wrote in a 1960 essay. He was describing the hysteria that was arising before the US presidential election that year, which was no different from the frenzy in the run-up to other inconsequential elections, he recalled.

And now, more than fifty years and a dozen elections later, we face once again “the most important election in our

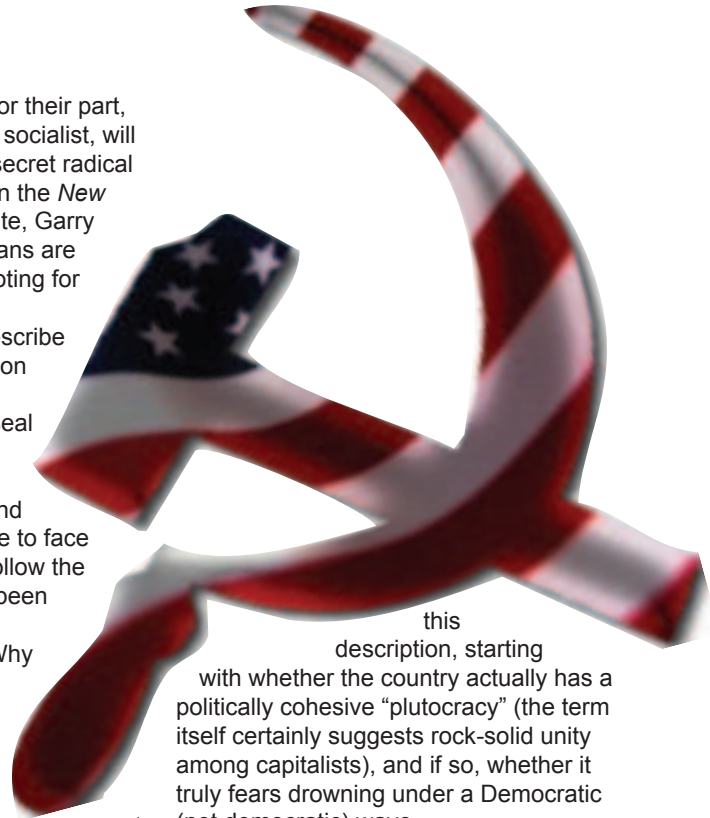
lifetime.” The Republicans, for their part, fear that Obama, the stealth socialist, will finally implement his super-secret radical agenda. In a recent article on the *New York Review of Books* website, Garry Wills explains how Republicans are trying to scare people into voting for Romney:

“Republican operatives describe this year’s presidential election in apocalyptic terms. It will determine our future. It will seal our national fate. . . . They tell Republican voters that President Obama, in a second term where he does not have to face re-election, will reveal and follow the full socialist agenda he has been trying to hide.”

But that article by Wills (‘Why 2012 Matters’) was written to scare people into voting for Obama! The line I took out in the middle of the passage quoted is: “*Well, they are probably right, but not for the reason they give.*” In other (less mealy-mouthed) words, Wills himself is describing the 2012 presidential in “apocalyptic terms” and saying it will (probably) “seal our national fate” – as he explains:

“[T]his election year gives Republicans one of their last chances – perhaps the very last one – to put the seal on their plutocracy. They are in a race against time. A Democratic wave is rising fast, to wash away the plutocracy before it sets its features in concrete, with future help from the full (not just frequent) cooperation of the Supreme Court.”

There is a lot that can be said about




this description, starting with whether the country actually has a politically cohesive “plutocracy” (the term itself certainly suggests rock-solid unity among capitalists), and if so, whether it truly fears drowning under a Democratic (not democratic) wave.

In any case, the simple point to make here is that Democratic ‘operatives’ (like Wills) rely on the same scare tactics as the Republicans, with plutocrats (or fascists) and Christian extremists serving as the bogeymen instead of socialists and Muslims. These operatives are now in a race against time . . . to finish their anti-Romney books before the November election.

No doubt, the untold story of Mitt Romney as plutocratic puppet with ties to grassroots Mormon-fascist organizations will be rolling off the presses soon.

**MIKE SCHAUERTE**



## Party News

The Socialist Party stood two candidates in the election to the Greater London Assembly on 3 May. Here are the results:

**Lambeth and Southwark:** Labour, 83,239; Conservative, 30,537; Liberal Democrat, 18,359; Green Party, 18,144; UKIP, 4,395; Socialist (Danny Lambert), 2,938 (1.9%).

**Merton and Wandsworth:** Conservative, 65,197; Labour, 55,216; Liberal Democrat, 11,904; Green Party, 11,307; UKIP, 3,717; Independent, 2,424; Socialist (Bill Martin), 1,343 (0.9%).

The on-line London magazine, the *Big Smoke*, did a video interview with our candidate in Lambeth and Southwark which can be seen here: <http://www.bigs smoke.org.uk/?p=77382>

Readers may be interested to note that the party virtually doubled its percentage vote in Lambeth and Southwark compared to four years ago when we last stood there.



# Explaining the paranormal



*Marx's original ideas and his worldview are very much in the sceptical tradition of philosophy. When we say we are scientific socialists, what we mean is that we are sceptical in the same way that scientists should be sceptical – rejecting dogma in favour of doubt, and thus allowing the possibility of progress. But is a properly scientific attitude consistent with capitalism, (with all its contradictions and hypocrisies, invisible hands and other dogmatic notions)? We put some questions to Chris French (left), head of the Anomalistic Psychology Unit at Goldsmiths College, London and former editor of The Skeptic.*

## **1. What exactly is 'anomalistic psychology' and what have you learned from it?**

Anomalistic psychology may be defined as the study of extraordinary phenomena of behaviour and experience, including (but not restricted to) those that are often labelled 'paranormal'. It is directed towards understanding bizarre experiences that many people have without assuming a priori that there is anything paranormal involved. It entails attempting to explain paranormal and related beliefs and ostensibly paranormal experiences in terms of known psychological and physical factors.

## **2. You like to test people's unscientific beliefs scientifically. How do they react when you prove their beliefs false?**

We would never claim to have disproved a claim of, say, psychic powers on the basis of a single test. All that we could conclude is that under the particular conditions of that particular test, the results do not support the claim. Taken in the wider context of numerous other failures to support such claims and more plausible non-paranormal explanations of the phenomena in question, others can draw their own conclusions. We always ensure that claimants agree that the test is fair before we begin but the reaction from the claimants once they fail the test is always the same. They come up with reasons why, in retrospect, the test wasn't actually fair at all!

## **3. People often manage to live with 'cognitive dissonance' through denial. Is there an evolutionary value in deluding oneself or is this an accident of advanced cognition?**

Our brains have evolved for survival, not necessarily for apprehending "Truth". In terms of the evolutionary cost-benefit analysis, it makes more sense for us to come to quick decisions that are usually right rather than slower decisions that are right slightly more often (is that rustling in the bushes really a sabre-toothed tiger?). Thus we tend to think using heuristics (quick and dirty rules of thumb) that are good enough to usually lead to the right conclusion. But they can lead us astray. Sometimes we think we've found a

meaningful pattern or connection when there is not really one there.

## **4. Has your research suggested ways in which changing mindsets might be made easier?**

Extreme believers (and extreme sceptics for that matter!) will probably never change their opinions regardless of the evidence. They are trapped in an "intellectual black hole" in which they employ various strategies to allow them to dismiss any evidence that does not support their views. The key to changing mindsets is education, education, education – in particular, giving people the critical thinking skills they need to evaluate evidence for themselves. The aim is to tell people how to think not what to think.

## **5. Would you say that the study of religious beliefs is a branch of anomalistic psychology?**

The psychology of religion is already a recognized, albeit very specialized, sub-discipline of psychology. In general, researchers in this area have tended to hold religious views themselves. More recently, anomalistic psychologists, who tend to be more likely to be atheist or agnostic, have provided a different perspective on a range of religious topics such as near-death experiences, the power of prayer, and mystical states.

## **6. You've argued that people who believe in conspiracy theories are more likely to be alienated individuals. Why do you think this is?**

The limited findings available do indeed support the not-too-surprising conclusion that those who feel alienated are more likely to believe in conspiracies. A number of factors appear to underlie this. For example, those who feel alienated will, almost by definition, distrust the government. This can lead to them endorsing mutually contradictory conspiracies such as Osama Bin Laden being still alive and him having been killed many years ago! Also, those who are alienated are probably drawn to conspiracy theories because such theories provide an explanation for their own marginalized position in society. They feel that they have been held back or pushed out by powerful "others" who are working behind the scenes.



# Apocalypse now?

On December 21, 2012, the end of the world is predicted by some. According to their calculations, which are based on the Mayan long-count calendar (and some serious mushrooms no doubt), the world will end in a cataclysmic event on or around that date. Or the magnetic poles will shift. Or the sun will burn us up. Or even a planet called Nibiru or Planet X will smash into us. Or we shall get sucked into a black hole. Or, of course, and more obviously, it could all just be ill-formed pseudo-science clap-trap. Undeterred, the *Socialist Standard* will take a quick look into the future to see if it's worth publishing any more issues, and it will start with the basis of the above theories, known as the Mayan (or 2012) Prophecy.

## Mayan Civilisation

The Mayans were an advanced ancient civilisation with hierarchical government, trade and commerce and advanced building techniques which expressed themselves in large cities and many elaborate stone temples that are still here today. They also studied and paid great heed to astronomy and the configurations of the stars and planets, and worked out quite complex mathematical problems, including those related to the study of time. The Maya had worked out the solar year with better accuracy than the Europeans, even though the Mayan calendar was cruder, having exactly 365 days in each year, so that it was inaccurate by one day in every four years. By contrast, our present calendar is accurate to one day in every 3,275 years. It is the Mayan calendar, however, that has given rise to the 'end of world' predictions, as *Wikipedia* explains:

"December 2012 marks the conclusion of a b'ak'tun—a time period in the Mesoamerican Long Count calendar which was used in Central America prior to the arrival of Europeans. Unlike the 52-year Calendar Round still used today among the Maya, the Long Count was linear rather than cyclical, and kept time roughly in units of 20:

"20 days made a uinal, 18 uinals (360 days) made a tun, 20 tuns made a k'atun, and 20 k'atuns (144,000 days or roughly 394 years) made up a b'ak'tun. Thus, the Mayan date of 8.3.2.10.15 represents 8 b'ak'tuns, 3 k'atuns, 2 tuns, 10 uinals and 15 days.

"Additionally there is a strong tradition of 'world ages' in Mayan literature, but the record has been distorted, leaving several possibilities open to interpretation. According to the *Popol Vuh*, a compilation of the creation accounts of the K'iche' Maya of the Colonial-era highlands, we are living in the fourth world. The *Popol Vuh* describes the gods first creating three failed worlds, followed by a successful fourth world in which humanity was placed. In the Maya Long Count, the previous world ended after 13 b'ak'tuns, or roughly 5,125 years. The Long Count's 'zero date' was set at a point in the past marking the end of the third world and the beginning of the current one, which corresponds to 11 August 3114 BC in the proleptic Gregorian calendar. This means that the fourth world will also have reached the end of its 13th b'ak'tun, or Mayan date 13.0.0.0.0, on December 21, 2012."

In 1957, Mayanist and astronomer Maud Worcester Makemson wrote: "the completion of a Great Period of 13 b'ak'tuns would have been of the utmost significance to the Maya". In 1966, Michael D. Coe wrote in *The Maya* that "there is a suggestion ... that Armageddon would overtake the degenerate peoples of the world and all creation on the final day of the 13th [b'ak'tun]. Thus ... our present universe would be annihilated in December 2012 when the Great Cycle of the Long Count reaches completion."

Thus began the idea that the world would end this December. But it has little basis in any study of Mayan thought: "...there is nothing in the Maya or Aztec or ancient Mesoamerican prophecy to suggest that they prophesied a sudden or major change of any sort in 2012," said Mayanist scholar Mark Van Stone. "The



notion of a 'Great Cycle' coming to an end is completely a modern invention." Even the Maya themselves deny this ridiculous notion – Ricardo Cajas, president of the Colectivo de Organizaciones Indigenas de Guatemala, said the date "did not represent an end of humanity or fulfilment of the catastrophic prophecies."

### Socialist Perspective

So how does the above crackpotism affect socialists? Aside from the application of simple scientific method and research to prove the above as nonsense, it is interesting to see the reaction within capitalism to the rise of such theories. A short search of the internet will reveal a raft of sites supporting and furthering the doomsday predictions and all of them eventually link to solutions that involve the spending of money. Many offer survival kits from the simple \$30 (£20) personal carry-packs to the extremes of \$40,000 (£26,000) for a space in a communal shelter and upwards of \$200,000 (£130,000) for one of your own with exclusive land. Apart from each having their own take on these mad end-of-world theories, most of these sites have scary countdown clocks to enhance the panic effect and make those dollar bills fall from wallets faster. Ignoring the obvious fact that if the future is that bleak, you probably wouldn't want to survive anyway, it seems that no-one is concerned with the thought that if any of the major scenarios predicted actually do occur, then dollars and, indeed, all money will become meaningless.

While large numbers of people are engaged in essentially harmless activities and spending money at the same time, they are not occupied with finding out

about real alternatives to the current state of affairs. As socialists, we have a duty to point out that aside from the utterly unscientific basis of these insane predictions, the real problems exist in the here and now and that capitalism is incapable of solving them. Moreover, if a doomsday scenario did occur, you can be sure that the rich would only be concerned with protecting their own hides and that the global capitalist system would not leap to the rescue of the masses nor would it care. Its only function is making profit, even if it results in its own destruction. Proof positive of this assumption can be seen in capitalism's weak and uncoordinated response to the threat of global warming – the system's demand for profits always winning out over human need.

The world won't end in 2012. And capitalism won't end unless we work globally as socialists to counter this doomsday nonsense by concentrating our energies into building a truly global society based on free access for all. No-one can predict the precise nature of the future but our actions now can make that future much brighter for everyone.

**DAVID HUMPHRIES**

"I've been teaching for 30 years, and I find this to be one of the best short films I have ever used" **DOUG BROWN,**  
**PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS, NORTH ARIZONA UNIVERSITY**

*Capitalism and Other Kids' Stuff* is a short film from The Socialist Party which questions some of the most basic assumptions about life in capitalism.

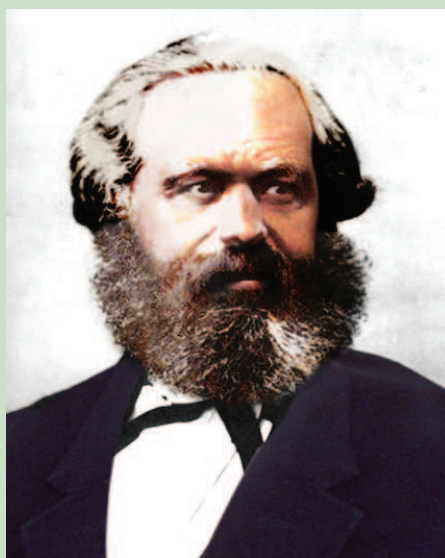
For a copy, complete the order form on page 7



# Marx and materialism

IF MARX had a philosophy it could be best described in his own words as critical materialism as opposed to mechanistic materialism. He believed with Feuerbach that critical materialism would mean the end of metaphysics and religion. Again, Marx regarded materialism as the only valid expression of scientific method. Thus, in a footnote on Page 368, Vol. I of *Capital*, he refers to a particular method as the only materialistic and, therefore, the only scientific method.

Marx took the world that is man and his relations with nature as they are. Marx then embraced a thoroughgoing naturalism as opposed to the super-naturalism of Hegel and other religious thinkers. He believed that facts are not more real than they are found to be, and do not express some deeper underlying truth. It was because Marx collected his facts and organised the knowledge gained from them on the presupposition that he was dealing with a material world, that his theory can be empirically demonstrated. Because Hegel began with metaphysical as opposed to materialistic



assumptions he could offer no empirical guide as to the course of history. He could only assure us that a cosmic self-consciousness would come to pass, but how it would do so he is silent. Even in a brief and sketchy analysis of Marx and Hegel, it can be shown that in outlook and method they were worlds apart.

On the question of religion itself, Marx denied that there was some religious essence in man. Religion

itself is a product of social life and it only arises when society has reached a certain stage of development in the division of labour. Like all other forms of culture, it can be critically analysed in a specific social situation, and like all other forms of activity it can be shown to change under the impact of changing conditions. While religion had historic justification in the productive rituals of the past, it serves no useful social purpose today.

Marx also denied that man was endowed with a natural religious sentiment, any more than he is naturally endowed with any other aspect of culture. A religious sense is not the outcome of a timeless abstraction, but the product of social consciousness and bound up with a certain stage of social development. To suppose then that any element of supernaturalism could find a place in Marxism is to invalidate the most basic assumptions of historical materialism. For that reason a belief in super-naturalism is incompatible with Marxism.

*Socialist Standard*, July 1957

# The Irish Euro Referendum



*Voting one way or the other was not going to change the reality that capitalism in a slump means extra austerity.*

On the 31<sup>st</sup> May, the electorate of the Republic of Ireland went to the polls to decide on the latest European Union fiscal treaty. The referendum was passed with 60 percent of voters in favour and 40 percent opposed. The Treaty (known as the Stability treaty to its supporters and referred to as the Austerity treaty by opponents) is part of the attempt by Europe to contain the turbulence that has engulfed Euro-zone countries for the past three years. In broad terms signing up to the pact commits the governments of the signatory countries to limit annual deficits and over the economic cycle to maintain a balanced budget. In return for committing to this, the signatory countries are promised access to the EU's new assistance fund, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) if needed in the event that countries cannot raise funds from the capital markets. Most countries within the European Union, both within and outside the Euro-zone, have indicated a willingness to ratify the Treaty and it is expected to come into force early in 2013.

## Yes and No

Regarding the campaign that preceded the vote in Ireland, the sides lined up in a predictable fashion. Advocating a Yes were the government (a coalition of the centre-right Fine Gael party and centre-left Labour Party) together with Fianna Fail (long a dominant force in Irish politics but currently much diminished due to their abject handling of the economic crisis that overwhelmed Ireland in 2009) and the majority of big business and farming interests. Conventionally these are regarded as the establishment centre ground.

The opposition consisted of Euro-sceptics from the left and right and single issue political mavericks who customarily appear on these occasions. Leftist opposition primarily consisted of Sinn Féin augmented by the Socialist Party (ex-Militant), Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party of Ireland and People before Profit (an organisation that could be characterised as a front for the two 'Socialist' groups). The rightist component

of the opposition in the main came from Declan Ganley and his mysterious Libertas organisation (having minimal membership or popular participation in Ireland and yet amazingly well funded) together with some non-party members of the Irish Parliament and further reinforced with certain publicity-seeking economic commentators. As a whole the trade union movement adopted a position of neutrality though individual union leaders could be found on either side.

The whole context of the debate was framed by the fact that Ireland is currently in receipt of a large loan from the International Monetary Fund and the EU to cover both the government deficit and the huge losses sustained by private Irish Banks due to the property boom (formerly called the Celtic Tiger) that took place in Ireland prior to 2008. The fact that the Irish government (popularly interpreted as the Irish





taxpayer/citizen) has had to pick up the tab for 40 billion euros of private debt has proved especially controversial and naturally has caused genuine and understandable bitterness across whole swathes of Irish society. While the initial decision to cover the losses on these private speculative loans was taken by the Irish government, to prop up the banking sector, the continuance of the banking guarantee has been insisted upon by the European Union as a condition of the bail out. Over the past three years, this has been the main bone of contention between the government of the day and the opposition; the former regarding it as unpalatable but unavoidable while the latter demand a tougher stance to be taken on the issue with Europe.

### For and Against

Given the major uncertainty that now exists about the medium term future of the European economy and particularly of the fate of the Euro itself, a trump card for the Yes side was the fact that Ireland may require a second bail-out when the current IMF/EU assistance ends next year and the thus need to ensure access to the EMU fund in that eventuality by backing the Treaty. This almost certainly swayed people who depend directly on the state for their income such as pensioners, public sector workers and those in receipt of social welfare payments. The government also kept repeating the point that passing the Treaty would instil confidence in Ireland from international investors and the subsequent inflow of funds would promote job creation and help the economy to recover.

The No side's major argument was that passing the Treaty would copper-fasten a monetarist economic strategy and prohibit future governments from stimulating the economy with Keynesian type initiatives. They declared it would result in many years of unbroken austerity to come with inevitable cuts to social services. A more nationalistic message was also put forward accusing the government of being too timid in defending Ireland's interests and too willing to fall into line with the wishes of the large powers in the EU (primarily meaning Germany) especially in readily subsuming the massive private bank debt into sovereign debt in order to help stabilise the Euro currency.

While the government won the debate with its clearcut electoral victory, it derived very little political capital from its success as it just ensures continuance of the status quo. A defeat would have damaged its standing, both nationally and internationally so in that sense the referendum was always going to be thankless for them. It's generally accepted the big winners were Sinn Fein as the lead mainstream organisation on the No side. Irish electoral rules demand equal access to be given to both sides in any referendum on the constitution irrespective of the relative size of either side. Hence Sinn Fein received huge publicity and air time to expound their ideas and the campaign marked a further stage on their long and calculated transition from being the front organisation and principal apologist for an entirely undemocratic terrorist group (Provisional IRA) to becoming an acceptable alternative to the existing political options. During the campaign their spokespeople blended vaguely radical sentiments about taking a tough line with Bankers (both Irish and European) to defend Irish interests while assuring the electorate of their commitment to financial discipline. From that perspective, they are part of a long history of parties who have moved from a nominal, if unconvincing, opposition to capitalism to outright acceptance of it as the only means of ordering society.

### Leftwing advice

The debate associated with the campaign highlighted yet again the fact that many movements claiming to be Labour or Socialist or Left Wing ultimately are only offering a re-ordering

**“Labour unrest can only be ended by the abolition of the capitalist system of wealth production with its inherent injustice and poverty”**

**Irish Labour Party, 1912**

of capitalism. The Communist Part of Ireland advocated a No vote and suggested Ireland should borrow money from sovereign wealth funds from countries such as Russia, China, Norway and various Middle East funds as an alternative to seeking to obtain loans from the markets or the European Stability Mechanism on the basis that better terms would be available. Such financial advice to the government of the day is a curious activity for a group with the name of 'Communist' in its title. Kieran Allen a leading member of People Before Profit and the Socialist Workers Party also attacked the Treaty from a financial standpoint on the basis that it was a 'bad deal' for Ireland and that its costs would exceed its benefits.

He may of course be proved correct but again this viewpoint is devoid of socialist content. He also indulged in the common electoral practice of scaring pensioners about the entitlements they might lose if the Treaty was passed, which of course is the type of tactic that all political parties engage in as part of the shoddy custom of drumming up votes from sectors of the electorate. Possibly the most poignant aspect to all of this is that May 2012 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Irish Labour Party in a congress in Clonmel in 1912. One of the resolutions at that meeting committed the new party to the notion 'that labour unrest can only be ended by the abolition of the capitalist system of wealth production with its inherent injustice and poverty'. While it is not news that such revolutionary rhetoric has long been discarded, it does highlight the fruitless path that these social-democratic parties have followed whereby they are now further away from their original goals than when they first started out.

On one level from a socialist view, the campaign and its result is entirely devoid of interest. There has been a boom and now we have the bust; this is an inevitable part of the capitalist system. Voting one way or the other was not going to change this reality and studies revealed that this was tacitly accepted by the majority of the electorate. The referendum was an example of the sham that is democracy under capitalism; as members of whatever electorate we happen to belong to we are constantly being cajoled to take part in the democratic process when it's clear that voting will not make any meaningful difference to our future. For the case in point, the prospects for Ireland's economy and the future of the Euro will not be decided by the result of the Irish referendum but will depend more strongly on economic developments in Spain and the political situation in Greece. Fundamentally as regards the common currency it will hinge on the willingness of German capitalism to persevere with the Euro by balancing the great benefits it bestows to its powerful export sector against the costs it imposes on the wider economy and its ability to strike a bargain with France on the issue.

**KEVIN CRONIN**



# Football wars



In 1969 rioting by fans during a World Cup match between Honduras and El Salvador appeared to trigger a four-day military conflict – the so-called football war. In fact, the Salvadoran generals merely used the rioting as a convenient occasion for launching a planned attack on Honduras. The main cause of tension was land disputes between Salvadoran migrants in Honduras and local farmers.

Nevertheless, competitive sports like football do have connections

The East European media have played their part in fomenting hatred. For example, on the eve of the Russian-Polish match Polish newspapers took care to remind their readers of the 'Miracle on the Vistula' – the victory of Polish arms in the war of 1920 with Bolshevik Russia.

When talking about 'football hooliganism' it is important to distinguish between spontaneous acts by excited fans and the much more serious violence orchestrated by the gangs or 'firms' that are attached to many football clubs. These firms

The SNA is related to the All-Ukrainian Union 'Freedom' (Svoboda), which has captured control of large areas of western Ukraine, including Lvov and other cities, and is poised to enter the national parliament. Both have their origin in the old Social-National Party, but Svoboda has cultivated a more respectable image. You can find videos of their torchlight marches through Ukraine's cities at <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/europe/120329/ukraine-svoboda-nationalist-party-nazi->



with war. The Duke of Wellington is supposed to have said that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. The connections are especially striking where competing teams represent different nations and the memory of past wars is still fresh – or is artificially revived by nationalist politicians and publicists.

The Euro 2012 soccer finals, co-hosted by Poland and Ukraine, offer a veritable feast of national and racial hatred. When Russia played the Czech Republic in Lvov (western Ukraine) on June 8, Russian fans threw lighted fireworks and fought Ukrainian fans. When Russia played Poland in Warsaw on June 12, Russian fans clashed with Polish fans and police, leaving 15 injured. Fans from several East European countries have made black players on West European teams targets of racial abuse. And so it goes on.

are paramilitary organizations that supply commanders, provide training in armed and unarmed combat and conduct preliminary reconnaissance of unfamiliar terrain. They are often infiltrated or even controlled by ultra-nationalist political groups that recruit among fans.

On June 13, *The Sun Today* described a training and indoctrination camp set up on an abandoned Soviet military base near Ivano-Frankivsk in western Ukraine by Patriot of Ukraine – the paramilitary auxiliary of the fascist Social-National Assembly (SNA). The SNA website ([sna.in.ua](http://sna.in.ua)) – under the motto 'Strength! Order! Wellbeing!' – explains that Patriot of Ukraine is "the revolutionary avant-garde of the Ukrainian social-nationalist movement" and was established to "purge the nation" and guard the SNA.



echoes-hitler-pt-2.

The 'national identities' inculcated through competitive sports impart a sense of meaning and importance. They offer an illusory escape from humdrum lives. For the 'hooligans' there is also the temporary emotional release and addictive adrenalin rush of acted-out aggression – cheaper and perhaps less risky than alternatives such as drugs. The identity and meaning are sham, because ordinary working people live much the same lives and face much the same problems everywhere. National identities have nothing to do with real life. But they do the ruling class a great service by blocking any alternative identity rooted in real life – an identity capable of uniting working people throughout the world in the fight for a life from which we will not feel the need to escape.

**STEFAN**



# OBITUARY

## Stan Parker

Stan Parker, of North London branch, died at the beginning of June at the age of 84. In 2008 he wrote his own obituary which we publish below.

In it he refers to “writing a few books, mainly on work and leisure”. He was in fact a pioneer in the field of leisure studies not just in Britain but across the English-speaking world, respected by his peers who in 1997 made him the first honorary member of the Leisure Studies Association. After his retirement from the social survey division of the Census Office, he taught at the University of the Third Age in Britain and Australia. He also represented the Party in local elections and the 2009 European election.

Here is the obituary he wrote.

“Stan Parker, who first joined the Party in 1950, has made up his time sheet. Orthodox, conformist, non-controversial, unimaginative are not among the best descriptions of Stan’s life and work. He drafted this obituary himself, offered it to the editors, and agreed to some minor changes they imposed.

Stan met the Party in the politically exciting WW2 end year 1945, at the Hyde Park platform, notably that of Tony Turner. Stan found the Party’s Object clear,

concise and inspirational. But he took 5 years to get his head sufficiently round the archaically-worded D of P to apply for membership. He soon became a regular writer for the *Socialist Standard* and in 1952 was appointed one of the editors of *Forum*, the newly launched internal Party journal.

Although the early 1950s saw a big growth in Party membership and activities, it was also a time of what one member called ‘introversion’. In 1955 Stan, Tony and a few other ‘dissidents’ were obliged to resign or face a charge. For the next 37 years Stan wandered in the socialist wilderness, pursuing academic and civil service careers and writing a few books, mainly on work and leisure.

By 1992 he had lost most of the arrogance of youth and the Party, having expelled two undemocratic branches, had become more tolerant. So he rejoined and again became active, even being elected to a few Executive Committees. Stan never thought that opposition to capitalism would be enough to abolish it. He constantly stressed the need to start building the new socialist world society *now*. His books, *Stop Supporting Capitalism, Start Supporting Socialism* (2002, reviewed *Socialist Standard*, March 2003) and *Towards 2100: From Capitalism to Socialism* (2004) are available at or from Head Office, free of charge.”



## Responsible capitalism: no such thing

*In May we were interviewed to contribute to a short film on ‘responsible capitalism’ to be shown at a meeting of ‘investor relations’ professionals. Here are the answers we prepared to their set questions.*

### Why do you think capitalism is in crisis?

Capitalism is in the middle of an economic crisis because it goes through repeated cycles of boom and slump. It’s just that the present economic downturn is bigger and longer-lasting than the others since the 1930s. Despite what Keynes taught and what Gordon Brown claimed to have done, the boom/sump cycle cannot be eradicated. It is built-in to capitalism. There is another sense that capitalism is in crisis. The word ‘capitalism’ has become a dirty word. It has no inspiring vision of the future to offer. Its defenders no longer have the self-confidence they had 20-30 years ago. This is a good thing as capitalism really does have nothing to offer.

### Are wealth creation and the good of society mutually exclusive concepts?

That depends on what you mean by ‘wealth creation’. Wealth is not created by entrepreneurs but by people working with their hands and brains to make things and provide services and, yes, profit-seeking and the pursuance of the good of society are mutually exclusive.

### What’s your opinion on banker bonuses and executive pay?

That some bankers and top executives are ripping off shareholders. But, as Socialists, we’re not worried about that. It’s for them to fight out amongst themselves. It’s of no concern to those who work for a wage or a salary.

### What should be the role of corporates and business in wider society?

It’s not a question of what should be but of what, given capitalism, has to be. Legally as well as economically, corporations are obliged to try to maximise profits. If one corporation didn’t it wouldn’t generate enough funds to invest in innovations to keep up with the competition. It would go under. The role of corporations and business in a capitalist society is to make and accumulate profits. That’s actually reflected and enshrined in company law, so that if the executives of a business decided to pursue some philanthropic or charitable aim at the expense of profits they could be sued by the shareholders.

### Can capitalism really have a core social purpose? (Capitalism is nature-prone to create divisions and social strata)

No, capitalism cannot have any other purpose than the economic one of making and accumulating profits. It cannot serve any other social purpose and cannot be made to. It is based on a division of society into those who own and control the places where wealth is produced and those who don’t. This may not be the 1 percent/99 percent division popularised by the Occupy Movement but it will be something near to that, maybe 5 percent/95 percent. Yes, capitalism is nature-prone to perpetuate this class divide. Profits and riches accumulate for the few while the rest of us are rationed by the size of our pay cheque. The rich always get richer even if the rest of us don’t always get poorer (as we are in the present economic downturn).

### Next steps, how do you see things developing?

We know how we’d like to see things develop: a growing worldwide anti-capitalist movement that will eventually end capitalism and replace class ownership by common ownership and democratic control and production for profit by production directly to satisfy people’s needs. If this doesn’t happen then capitalism will just stagger on from crisis to crisis while social needs and the good of society continue to be neglected.

## Marx

**Karl Marx. By Paul Thomas, Reaktion Books, 2012**



This is a concise, though not always easy to read, exploration of Marx's life and writing. It can be usefully compared and contrasted with Francis Wheen's best-seller *Karl Marx* (1999), which is

more accessible but less reliable. Biographies of Marx these days have to declare where they stand on Marx's alleged illegitimate son. The sole source for this allegation is a typewritten letter supposedly written by the estranged wife of Karl Kautsky. It is claimed that it was written in 1898 but was only made public, in mysterious circumstances, in 1962. Wheen is in no doubt that the allegation is true because, he says, the circumstantial evidence supports it. Thomas on the other hand, after weighing up the evidence, concludes that the allegation sits somewhere between 'strains credibility' and 'stinks to high heaven'.

In Thomas's book there is picture of the philosopher Hegel, whom Marx, the accompanying caption claims, 'stood on his head'. Marx actually claimed that he found Hegel's philosophy to be already standing on its head and that he stood him 'right side up'. In Hegel's philosophy the real world results from the unfolding of ideas, whereas for Marx ideas arise from and interact within a specific material context. There is no discussion of Marx's dialectic in the book, from which we must assume it is of no importance. Wheen, by contrast, repeats the common misconception that Marx's dialectic is a form of logical syllogism: thesis, antithesis and synthesis. But this is precisely the kind of idealism which Marx had rejected after he had stood the Hegelian philosophy of his youth 'right side up'. It is the understanding of material circumstances, particularly the economics of capitalism, which provides the 'guiding thread' for comprehending the world around us.

Both Thomas and Wheen argue that Marx's legacy is still relevant today. It can also be argued that Marx's ideas have never been put into practice, and an example of this is suggested by Thomas's book.

At the end of the Franco-Prussian War, in 1871, the Paris Commune was formed. The Commune was an improvised organisation of Parisian workers set up to run and defend Paris. The French army brutally suppressed the Commune and slaughtered at least 20,000 of the Communards. Marx had no input into the creation or running of the Commune and the Commune took nothing from Marx. Afterwards he did write *The Civil War in France* in defence of the Commune, and from this the press claimed (mistakenly) that Marx was the mastermind or strategist behind the Commune, conferring on him the title 'red terror Doctor'. Marx for the first time became notorious – but for an event which owed absolutely nothing to him. So apart from the evidence of his own writings, there are historical grounds for arguing that Marx's legacy has been misunderstood and unrealised.

**LEW**

## Reality

**Policing the Crisis. Class War. 44 pages. £1.**



This is a pamphlet published this May Day by the anarchist group known for the photographic series 'hospitalised coppers' and pictures of the

"Working Class Fights Back" at the 1990 Poll Tax Riot.

The section 'Police Crimes Against the Working Class Movement' is a historical survey of the police and the working class in Britain. Minority class property is why the police exist; the police force is part of the executive arm of the capitalist state, and as such, the enemy of the working class, even if that's from where its members are recruited.

The pamphlet reproduces Dave Douglass's 1986 *Come and Wet This Truncheon* which details police 'crimes' against the striking miners, their families and communities during the year-long strike. This makes sobering reading. If read in conjunction with *The Secret War Against the Miners* by Seamus Milne which details MI5 and Special Branch operations against them, it is quite clear the state is used by the capitalist class against the working

class to further its own economic interests.

Like Bakunin, Class War accepts Marx's class analysis and his economic theories about capitalism. Class War describes how "force is necessary by capitalism to move the developing situations towards a new balance of class relationships more favourable to them. It is never death or pain free".

As capitalism has become more 'unfettered' since the 1980s, the capitalist state has relied more on its enforcers to ensure the new economic relationships are 'accepted', and significantly, although statistics claim crime is going down, the prison population has doubled in size in the last thirty years. Today we have austerity economics imposed on us and dissent is ruthlessly dealt with; the police threaten to shoot protesting students; last summer's social breakdown in the inner cities has resulted in obviously political sentences for 'rioters'; and the concept of 'pre-crime' is now used to prevent any dissent against the bourgeois consensus of the Royal Wedding, Jubilee and the Olympics.

Class War are heirs to Bakunin with their emphasis on the 'propaganda of the deed': direct action philosophy, and opposition to taking part in capitalist elections (although Ian Bone, anarchist publisher of Class War, was involved in Bristol local elections in 2003, and Class War plan to stand a candidate for Mayor of Hackney in 2014).

As socialists we reject Bakunin's love of conspiracy, insurrection and his cult of violence. Marx once described 'anarchy' as the ultimate aim of the proletarian movement when classes will be abolished and the power of the state disappears. He can even be said to have anticipated that other historical anarchist Kropotkin in aiming at an anarchist communism which is a stateless, moneyless, wageless society and not a worker's state.

**STEVE CLAYTON**

*Books received:*

*Arab Spring, Libyan Winter.* By Vijay Prashad. AK Press

*Haymarket Scrapbook.* AK Press.

### **SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX FOR 2011**

For a copy send 2 second-class stamps to: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN



**Don Giovanni by Mozart at Heaven, London, Sunday 29 April 2012**



Mozart's opera, *Don Giovanni*, is set in London in 1987 with a modern libretto by Ranjit Bolt. It was recently produced at the gay nightclub, Heaven in London. Bolt's libretto has gay philanderer, Don, sung by baritone Duncan Rock but the rest of the cast has been reversed: basses and tenors become sopranos and vice versa.

Mozart represents the rationalist enlightenment when the bourgeois classes were wresting power from the feudal masters of the *ancien regime* in 1789. His opera, *Marriage of Figaro*, portrays the servile classes as good as their masters. Mozart himself was a servant to an Archbishop and the Hapsburg Emperor.

Bolt's Don is both a feudal master with *droit de seigneur* and a greedy Thatcherite capitalist. The supernatural apparition of Il Commandatore at the denouement

does not have its horror-effect because the character appears like Miss Havisham from Dickens and elicits laughter from the audience. AIDS as a Faustian metaphor is not pursued in the libretto. This is a pity because Forman and Schafer in the 1984 film, *Amadeus*, successfully incorporated the dark elements of *Don Giovanni* into the tale of the Mozart and Salieri intrigue. The aria, *Il catalogo e questo*, is very funny and appreciated by the audience.

In 1987 there was a palpable sense of the smell of Weimar in Britain when Thatcher won a third election victory: capitalism had been unfettered, the nationalised industries sold-off and the working class beaten down with the end of the miners' strike. Increased powers had been given to the police, and a Tory MP had declared on the Channel 4 programme, *After Dark: Tomorrow Belongs to Us*, evoking the brown shirts of Cabaret-era Berlin. Capitalism had one of its periodic crises when the stock market crashed on Black Monday. There was AIDS, and the frenzied voices of the petite bourgeois were heard in the newspapers, the Tory Party, the House of Lords, and the Police. There was talk of re-criminalising homosexuality. The Government introduced Clause 28, prohibiting the promotion of homosexuality; 30,000 marched against it and "Lesbians invade the Lords and the BBC" screamed the tabloids.

Gay rights are subject to the whim of reformist politics and moral re-armament revivals in capitalist society, as can be seen from events in 1987. And even as recently as May 2012, in North Carolina, gay marriage has been prohibited. This is a contradiction of capitalism: it allows gay identity to develop but still needs the working class to reproduce. The family therefore has to be prioritised and homophobia is an inevitable by-product. Engels identified that oppression begins with the family and the rise of class society, and thus the oppression of women and gays has its origin in class society. With the end of capitalism, the bourgeois family will vanish and, as Engels wrote: "the traditional bonds of sexual relations, like all fetters, are shaken off". With the transformation to a socialist society all humanity will be emancipated and there will be an end to exploitation and oppression.

**Steve Clayton**



## A Load of Crystal Balls

*Psychic Today* (Sky 886, Freeview 32) must be on to something with its Tarot card readings and crystal energies. There has to be some kind of

supernatural force which bewitches the viewer into watching such a brain-atrophyingly inane show.

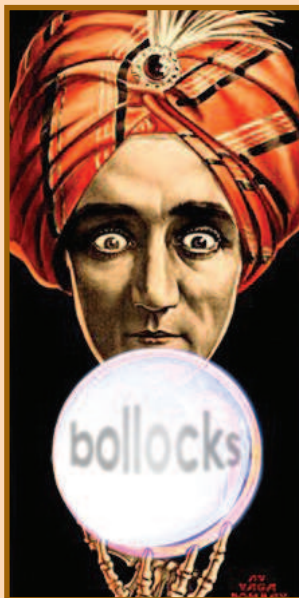
A shiny presenter and her psychic sidekick sit in their flimsy, tacky studio waiting for your questions about your life. Callers to the show receive a 'reading' via the programme's medium, and also the medium of premium-rate phone lines. Just send a text or leave a voicemail message, and one of a team of psychics will use cards, pendulums or 'working with energies' to interpret your situation or see what your future will bring.

Here are some chunks plucked out from their verbal vomit. Asked about a relationship between an Aries and a Cancer, one psychic 'explains' that "it's fire and water, isn't it? And sometimes fire can put the water out". Another one 'informs' us that "the psychic ability is very much I feel surrounded within the body of the sixth sense". Supposed psychic powers aren't discussed in any more de-

tail than that, forbidden by the set of guidelines the psychics must follow. This is presumably so they don't risk dabbling with forces beyond their control, such as trading standards legislation. These rules also prevent the psychics making lawsuit-attracting readings about health, pregnancy, money and legal matters. So, most of the readings relate to the callers' careers and relationships and are usually, as you'd expect, vague enough to apply to anyone.

These psychics aren't as clear as a crystal ball. Despite their fuzziness, specific details about someone's life can apparently sometimes be gleaned from only a date of birth, star sign, or – amazingly – even just a name. Tellingly, you never get to hear the punters say what they thought of their readings. Perhaps any criticism of their accuracy is avoided by the programme's policy of only giving reassuring or empowering readings, such as "if the energies are right, he'll come back. But remember you've done nothing wrong, and you're the better person". So, at least the show offers some kind of service to the lonely or confused, at a price. Sadly, the message: 'Hopeful Piscean wants to know if there'll be a revolution in his life' was left unanswered by the psychics.

**Mike Foster**



## Meetings

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

### North Wales

Wednesday **11 July** and Wednesday **25 July** at 7.30pm.

Group meeting.

The Palladium, 7 Gloddaeth Street, Llandudno LL30 2DD

### Glasgow

Wednesday **18 July** 8.30pm

HOW LENIN DISTORTED MARXISM  
Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow G 20 7YE

### East Anglia

Saturday, **21 July**, 12 noon to 4.00pm

East Anglia Regional Branch meeting.  
12 noon: informal chat/branch business  
1pm - 2pm: meal

2pm - 4pm: branch business

Prince of Wales Road, Norwich NR1 1DX  
(The meeting takes place in a side room separate to the bar.)

### London

#### Hammersmith

Sunday **22 July** 2 - 5.00pm

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE PRESENT  
ECONOMIC SYSTEM AND HOW TO  
GET TO A SOCIETY WHERE MONEY  
ISN'T NEEDED

Speakers from the Socialist Party and the  
Zeitgeist Movement.

Room 11, Irish Cultural Centre, 3

Blacks Road, W6 9DT (2 minutes from  
Hammersmith tube and bus station).

### Islington

Tuesday **24 July**, 8pm

THE CASE FOR SOCIALISM

Speaker: Bill Martin

Caxton House Community Centre, 129 St  
John's Way, N19 3RQ

### Manchester

Monday **23 July** 8.30pm

THE MUSIC AND LITERATURE OF  
PROTEST

Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre,  
M4 1PW.

## IMAGINE

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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

## Wall Street slump

WALL STREET got the twitch last month and so did London and the Bourses on the Continent. The newspapers rushed out pictures of the panic in 1929 and then had to set their City Editors to work to explain why 1929 cannot after all happen again.

Everybody seemed to have forgotten that just before 1929 the financial experts were assuring us that the crash which was in fact just around the corner could never happen anyway. If this does not make the experts of 1929 look very impressive in retrospect, it must also teach us that the forecasts of all capitalism's economic experts are not worth very much.

Nowadays the experts are fond of pointing out the precautions which (they are confident) would prevent a runaway boom like the one which preceded the 1929 crash and therefore (they reason) would also prevent the crash itself.

This ignores the fact that slumps are not the result of an attack of jitters on the Stock Exchange; rather is it the other way round. Nineteen-twenty-nine was one of capitalism's classic crises and no amount of stock juggling could have averted it.

Nor should we assume that hotheaded speculation is dead. *The Observer* correspondent in New York reported that the



“intellectuals” of Wall Street thought that: “By the end of last year the market had

reached heights that brokers now, without blushing, describe as insane.” and quoted one New York broker: “The way some of (the big brokers) have been pushing over-priced stocks at naive investors is nothing short of criminal.”

Perhaps a repeat of 1929 is not so impossible after all. For some of the experts were mystified by Wall Street's 1962 twitch. *The Guardian* said: “The continuing retreat is puzzling commentators in that there seems to be no apparent reason for it. Mr. Walter Heller, President Kennedy's economic adviser, said there were no economic grounds for the condition of the market.” Does this fill us with confidence that capitalism's economists could not be taken unawares by a repeat of 1929? It does not.

Capitalism could have something up its sleeve, just as it had thirty-three years ago, to surprise the experts and impoverish the rest of us.

(From “The News in Review”, *Socialist Standard*, July 1962)

# ACTION REPLAY

## Visiting Time

TOURISM IS big business in many countries, and sports tourism is a sizeable part of it, as witness the profits made by airlines, hotels and restaurants during major sporting events. The country with the biggest reliance on sport to boost its tourism and international reputation, however, must be the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which means mainly Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

This is partly a matter of providing sporting facilities for visitors (another tourist-oriented strategy there is the provision of museums and art galleries). There are a number of first-class golf courses, built and maintained at great expense in such an arid area. Or you can indulge in boating, water-skiing, even rock climbing and ice-skating. Cricket and rugby are popular among expat communities. And Manchester

City brought the Premier League trophy to Abu Dhabi recently, so it could go on display for two days in the club shop (The club's super-rich owner is half-brother to the UAE President).

But primarily the local elite are keen to attract top-class athletes and stage international competitions, thus enticing tourists and TV coverage. For instance, there have been top tennis tournaments, such as the Dubai Duty-Free Championships (prize this year of over \$400,000 to the singles winners). There are also top golf tournaments and horse racing fixtures, including the \$1m Dubai Gold Cup. Pakistan played England at cricket there earlier this year, and may play Australia in August/September.

And as we said, the tourism industry does very well out of all this. The 2013 Matchplay Championship Golf final will be hosted by the JW Marriott Marquis Dubai: it's a hotel, and will be the world's tallest when it opens later this year with its sixteen hundred rooms. On 2003 figures, one-fifth of the UAE population live below the poverty line.

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# Voice from the Back

## An Insane Society

Nothing sums up the priorities of capitalism better than the following news item. 'On Tuesday, the British government — in the midst of an austerity program that includes cutting education, health and retirement programs — announced contract awards of \$595 million to begin design of replacements for its four nuclear submarines that carry Trident sub-launched ballistic missiles. Currently, these submarines each have 16 missiles, each with three, independently guided warheads whose power is roughly eight times that of the Hiroshima bomb. Based in Scotland, one is on patrol at all times' (*Washington Post*, 24 May). Education, health and retirement programmes are of little concern when compared to a bomb with the potential of eight times the power of Hiroshima. Truly capitalism is a mad house.

## Dollars And Democracy

The American press is very fond of boasting about the political democracy in the USA compared to many other political set-ups throughout the world. An examination of the US political process reveals that it is far from democratic. 'US Republican candidate Mitt Romney raised almost \$17m (£11m) more than President Barack Obama's re-election effort in May, figures show. Mr Romney and the Republicans raised \$76.8m, while the Bema campaign and the Democratic Party brought in \$60m. Mr Romney now has \$107m cash on hand, almost matching the \$115m Mr Obama's campaign had by the end of April' (*BBC News*, 7 June). The role of the extremely rich and powerful in largely dictating the outcome of US elections shows

that big bucks count for far more than big ideas.

## Old, Poor And Hungry

Experts warn that many older people cannot afford a healthy diet, partly because rising energy bills force the worst off to choose between heating and eating. 'The official figures show that 531 people were admitted to hospital with a primary diagnosis of malnutrition in 2011 — more than ten a week. This is up 14 per cent in the last year and 47 per cent on the 362 who were hospitalised in 2007. The Equality and Human Rights Commission warned last year that home care was often so poor it put the elderly at risk of malnutrition. .... The figures are the tip of the iceberg, because thousands more people admitted to hospital for other reasons turn out to be badly nourished. Michelle Mitchell, of charity Age UK, said: 'It is estimated that one million older people are malnourished. Every case is preventable' (*Daily Mail*, 28 May). It speaks volumes about capitalism that after a lifetime of producing surplus value for the owning class many workers end their lives neglected and malnourished.

## Super-Rich Luxury

The newspapers may be full of economic crises with

mounting unemployment and increasing poverty for millions, but it is not all bad news. 'Their wardrobes are packed with haute couture and designer accessories but for the world's super-rich shopping is no longer enough: lavish one-of-a-kind travel adventures are the latest status symbol. Helicopter skiing in Alaska or a getaway to luxury goods group Lymph's exclusive hideaway in the Maldives are the current trends for the growing number of millionaires, according to a report. It predicts that, despite the euro zone crisis, spending on luxury goods will hit \$1.5tn (£975bn) this year as the wealthy look for novel ways to spend their riches' (*Guardian*, 5 June). Meanwhile, 'The market for diamonds is forecast for further soaring growth, outstripping even the buoyant wider luxury market, spurred by burgeoning demand from Asia. Bain & Company has forecast that spending will rise between 9 and 11 per cent this year because of a scarcity of large diamonds and continued demand among a cabal of billionaires' (*Times*, 9 June). For the super-rich it is a case of 'we never had it so good.'

## A Greek Tragedy

As ordinary Greeks have been thrown into ever greater poverty by wage and pension cuts and a seemingly endless array of new and higher taxes, their wealthy compatriots have been busy either whisking their money out of Greece or snapping up prime real estate abroad. 'Greek ship owners, who have gained from their profits being tax-free and who control at least 15% of the world's merchant freight, have also remained low-key. With their wealth offshore and highly secretive, the estimated 900 families who run the sector have the largest fleet in the world. As Athens' biggest foreign currency earner after tourism, the industry remitted more than \$175bn (£112bn) to the country in untaxed earnings over the past decade' (*Guardian* 13 June).



## FREE LUNCH

