

socialist standard

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

Roots and Shoots



Disparate, radical voices, past and present



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anniversary
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SEPTEMBER 2012

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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 6 October** at the address above. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

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Introducing The Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity

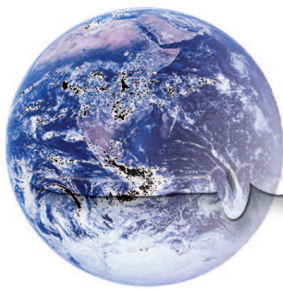
to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our

ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

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



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SEPTEMBER 2012

Editorial

A genuinely radical movement

THE HISTORY of capitalism is also, inevitably, the history of radical movements that have resisted the exploitation and conflict upon which the system rests. Working people, men and women, have always felt the inequality and oppressiveness of capitalism's class ownership and class power. They experienced at first hand the lack of freedom of the propertyless labourer, forced to work in another's man's fields and factories, in his warehouses and offices, and they understood more-or-less clearly how their lives were being used up for the benefit of others. From that experience and understanding they repeatedly challenged capitalism's institutions of privilege and power. They called for justice and for democratic accountability. They cited scripture, natural law and *the universal declaration of human rights* in support of their cause. They fought and are still fighting for their dignity as human beings in the streets, on public platforms and on the internet, often summoning resources of great courage and determination. They have left behind them a record of frustration, indignation and anger.

Working class history records these individuals and movements: Gerald Winstanley who in 1649 led his Diggers onto St George's Hill in Surrey, seeking to turn the world into "a common treasury for all"; the London crowds of the 1770s, roaring for, 'Wilkes and Liberty' and denouncing the monarchical government of George III; the Luddites of the early 1800s smashing machinery to protect their livelihoods, and thirty years later, the massed meetings of Chartists attentive to speakers like firebrand, Feargus O'Connor,

and voicing their demand for parliamentary representation. In the 20th century, innumerable radical movements have emerged: suffragists; liberationists; anti-war and anti-nuclear groups; environmentalists; and 'anti-capitalists' among them, and already in the new century, we hear, unmistakably, that same frustration, indignation and anger from Occupy as it searches for an adequate response to the banking crisis of 2008 and the current recession.

A few of these movements, like the Diggers, were truly radical and visionary. They attempted to create a new way for human beings to relate to each other, a way that was not based on property and exploitation. The Diggers failed, because they were few, and the forks and hoes they used to cultivate St George's Hill belonged to a technology that could not yet feed or free the world. In later centuries, most radical movements, like the Chartists and much of Occupy, have searched for ways to make capitalism work on behalf of the working class. They failed, or will fail, too, because social conflict and exploitation of workers is built into the body of capitalism itself – it's part of the system's DNA - and cannot be eliminated by modifying institutions or changing a few governments or laws. But technology has moved on, and what was beyond the grasp of the 17th-century Diggers is well within ours. Our message then to fellow members of the working class is to act together in a genuinely radical movement, not to prune back the system of exploitation, but to grub it up wholesale by its roots and turn the world's resources into a common treasury for all.

Heavenly Gates

IT MUST be a great feeling for anyone with a social conscience to be so ridiculously rich that they can spend their entire time doing something to alleviate a major global problem and actually feel that they are achieving something lasting and significant. Talk about the buzz, it must be a high that those seedy Russian oligarchs can never experience no matter how many yachtfuls of champagne they swim in or campaigning journalists they have knocked off by their hit-men. Cash-with-conscience philanthropists with billion dollar bank accounts must feel like the messiahs of the hi-tech age, second only to the great saints but without the unpleasantness of a stake-burning or a crucifixion to earn their place in the pantheon of the Blessed.

Bill Gates, through his charitable Foundation, is one such saint, who has poured billions into agricultural R & D, malaria, polio and a host of other third world problems and who is a leading light in the Giving Pledge, a club of super-philanthropists dedicated to giving up the lion's share of their wealth to solve problems of poverty, starvation and preventable disease among the world's poorest 'bottom billion'. Just last month the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation hosted a Reinvent the Toilet fair at their Seattle campus, a successful competition to find a design of lavatory that operates without running water, electricity or a septic system, at a running cost of no more than 3p a day and which captures or recycles energy. The applications of such a non-water-based design in many of the world's poorest and resource-starved countries are too obvious to need spelling out. Poor sanitation kills 1.5 million children a year, and causes 50 percent of hospital admissions across the developing world. Bill Gates has the Midas touch. Every social ill he turns his attention to instantly sprouts solutions. He can even turn poo into gold.

How could even the most jaded and cynical socialist find anything to criticise in the activities of such a man? Churlish in the extreme to whinge about the often ruthless methods by which St Bill got to be so rich in the first place. Here's a man who cares, really cares about the world's poor, and is so stupifyingly rich that he has no need to impress anyone by pretending fake concern. Ditto Warren Buffett, possibly the most class-conscious benefactor in the super-philanthropist club and famous for complaining that he pays less tax than his secretary. Ditto Mark Zuckerberg, the billionaire owner of Facebook who is barely out of his teens but whose ability to wield an economic power fifty countries would go to war to possess is mitigated, mercifully, by an apparently decent character and youthful save-the-world idealism. Arguably the force behind the super-philanthropy of the Giving Pledge is the ghost of Andrew Carnegie, in whose essay *The Gospel of Wealth* are to be found the arguments most influential in the thinking of these plutocrats. Carnegie's view was that of the enlightened plutocrat, the sort who knows he can't take it with him, the sort who has ceased to yearn for loot and now yearns for legacy. Carnegie, it must be said, meant well, and indeed even implied at one point that a future society might be built along egalitarian lines which would render his conception of top-down charity redundant. Given such a mentor, how could anyone gainsay the efforts of the 81 members of the billionaire club of the Giving Pledge, apart from perhaps suggesting mildly that all their money combined still won't go as far as they hope or achieve as much as they think?

To return to the poo competition, a team from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine submitted an entry which uses a black soldier fly larva to eat the organic waste and turn it into environmentally-friendly animal feed. This toilet



is now being field tested. The winning design from Caltech is solar powered and generates hydrogen fuel and electricity. These and other designs are fantastically useful and there is no question that with implementation they will improve the lives of millions across the world. Bill and Melinda score another home run.

But there is a sense in which Bill's public-spirited generosity has an insidious dimension. It's the sense in which he functions as capitalism's PR agent, always accentuating the positives, the successes, the achievements, the progress. Is it an achievement, for instance, to get 81 of the world's billionaires to join the Giving Pledge? Undoubtedly, and the best of luck to them. But what are we to make of the other 1145 billionaires (at 2012 estimates) who have not signed up? Some are perhaps hesitating. Many will have simply turned their noses up at the chance to give a little back. Socialists are always pointing out that the enemy of humanity is a system, a set of abstract social agreements, not any real living individual. However that doesn't alter the fact that many of the super-rich are evil, squalid little shits who, if there turned out to be a Hell, fully deserve to rot in it. Bill can't very well admit this in public since he acts as unofficial ambassador for these manicured Mafiosi. He's like Cliff Richard trying to front a death metal band. You only have to browse through the Forbes list (www.forbes.com/billionaires) and compare it to the Giving Pledge list (<http://blogs.wsj.com/wealth/2010/08/04/the-gates-buffett-giving-pledge-the-full-list-of-donors/>) to see how the vast majority of these paper princelings tend to regard the pressing issues of world poverty and hunger – they couldn't give a flying shite into a Bill Gates organic supertoilet.

But Bill's PR work doesn't simply consist of putting a nice face on a lot of nasty bastards. He also has ringing praise for the social system which put him where he is today: 'Capitalism is a phenomenal system because it's generated so much innovation. Other systems don't allow that to happen. There is no other system that's improved humanity, whether on a hundred year scale or a ten year scale. The world is better off...' (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-16738888>). Compared to what, feudalism? That's like saying that the NHS is better than witch-burning. Compared to Soviet 'communism'? That was nothing but state-run capitalism in disguise, like British Rail on a bad day but with show trials. What are these 'other systems' against which capitalism has performed so miraculously? Bill doesn't say and of course Bill doesn't know. It's just a rhetorical device. The only reason capitalism looks like a winner is because capitalism is the only horse running, a sure-fire bet that Bill and his friends won their money on. The real talent, the one that will make capitalism as obsolete as the Hansom cab, the future system Carnegie suspected might be possible, remains locked in the stables while Bill's earnest propaganda helps to keep it there.

What, to a socialist, is the real indictment of capitalism behind the Poo Competition in Seattle is the fact that any of these university teams could have come up with any of these designs without the Gates Dollar to spur them to heights of inventiveness, but they didn't. Why didn't they? Because scientists don't care? No. Because science has to do what money says and, except for the rare occasion when someone like Gates comes along with a wad of it, money doesn't care. Bill Gates thinks that money solves problems, but these are problems all created by money in the first place. Capitalism creates an apocalypse and then picks its way across the corpses rescuing the odd orphan, trumpeting its own philanthropy as it goes. Bill Gates surely knows this. They all do. Though it isn't nice to speak ill of the dead well off, in this sense, Bill and his friends are as full of shit as his toilets.

Lifestyle socialism?

Dear Editors

I have just been re-reading the article entitled "Why Jesus was not a socialist" in the June issue of the *Socialist Standard*. I still don't really understand it, and I'm left wondering how you define "a socialist"; which presumably is the description which SPGB members apply to themselves, today, as individuals living in capitalist societies. When members declare themselves as "socialist", is this purely because of their intellectual conviction and knowledge; or is it because they have adopted distinctive attitudes and behaviour within our present societies – in relationships with other people and the environment? Do members confine their socialism to seeking to persuade others verbally to become socialists? To make an extreme case, could someone continue in everyday life to be a capitalist while having convinced the SPGB intellectually that he/she understands and accepts the case for socialism – and thereby be called a socialist?

I have supposed that socialism is basically "From each according to their ability; to each according to their need." Should we each be trying now to live that way – however impracticable and futile that might seem to be; or may we feel free to join as much as we can in the ways of capitalism, hoping to get our own "snouts in the trough", until world-wide socialism comes?

ANDREW DURRANT, Garvestone, Norwich

Reply:

We call ourselves "socialists" because we want to see socialism established, i.e., a *society* based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production by the whole community. So, yes, if you put it that way, it is basically because of our "intellectual conviction and knowledge" rather than because we "have adopted distinctive attitudes and behaviour within our present system."

Obviously, the fact that our members want socialism will to a certain extent reflect itself in how they behave under capitalism, but this doesn't include not working for money. Given that we are living under capitalism where what you need has to be bought, it is not possible to live without trying to get

money – and getting it. There's no choice.

All those excluded from owning means of production, including socialists, are forced to work for money, even if we don't have to accept that the pursuit of money is the most important thing in life. Most people, even if they are not socialists, don't think this but unless you are prepared to lead a precarious existence on the margins of society you have to obtain money. And it is only above a certain level of income that people can choose to renounce getting as much as they could.

Can someone who is a capitalist be a socialist? Yes. Two examples would be Frederick Engels and William Morris. For them to have given up their wealth to live as workers would not have helped the cause of socialism. As it happened, both of them gave generously to the socialist movement. *Editors.*



He's not a socialist, he's a very naughty boy!

Olympics?

Dear Editors

Isn't the Olympic "Games" a bit of a misnomer?

In the midst of the festival of chauvinism dedicated to UK Capitalism plc, at least the BBC is honest enough to



admit what it's really all about in the article "Olympic success: How much does an Olympic gold medal cost?" (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-19144983>).

So much for Pierre de Coubertin's Olympic Creed "*Le plus important aux Jeux olympiques n'est pas de gagner mais de participer, car l'important dans la vie ce n'est point le triomphe mais le combat; l'essentiel, ce n'est pas d'avoir vaincu mais de s'être bien battu.*" ["The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part, because the important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is

not to have conquered but to have fought well."]

It seems to have been replaced by the tenet "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing."

Still, capitalism poisons everything, so why should sport be immune.

Martyn Dunmore, Brussels

Ken Smith

Dear Editors

Thank you for the obituary of Ken Smith in the August Standard. Ken was a very lively presence at Bristol Branch meetings in the 1980s. He was a wonderful example of someone who knew that it wasn't enough to be against capitalism but also necessary to be in favour of socialism. He and his wife Mavis held a number of memorable socialist discussion weekends at their self-built home in May Hill in Gloucestershire. Ken was fond of saying that their annual income had never been lower and their quality of life had never been higher - brought about by non-market exchanges with likeminded people in the surrounding area.

There was always lively discussion, plenty to think about and plenty to eat and drink. Ken was one of the most life-affirming characters I've

ever met and he was a force for socialism and for good. Those of us whose lives were touched by him were very lucky to have known him.

Keith Graham, Bristol

Debt

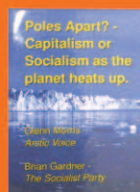
David Graeber has emailed comments on our review of his book *Debt* in the August Socialist Standard. We will publish it, together with our reply, in the October issue.

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Poles Apart?

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'All Christians need to turn to Islam', said a Boko Haram spokesman, or 'they would never know peace again'. (*Christian Post*, 16 July and 10 August). So much for inter-faith 'respect and understanding' there.

And 'Education and multi-faith action' doesn't seem to be on the agenda for girls in Deh'Subz, Afghanistan, according

An overdose of faith

'IT'S DIFFICULT if you talk about religious faith in our political system' complained Tony Blair comparing Britain with America. 'You talk about it in our system and, frankly, people do think you're a nutter' (*Daily Telegraph* 23 May 2009). Blair hasn't finished with us yet though. His attempts to prove whether or not he is a nutter are still to be completed.

Although the man who wanted to finish a speech while he was Prime Minister with 'God bless Britain' was unable to bomb his way to world peace - he sent troops into battle in Iraq in 1998 and again in 2003, Kosovo in 1999, Sierra Leone in 2000, and Afghanistan in 2001 - he now hopes to solve our problems with 'The Tony Blair Faith Foundation'. The purpose of this, apparently, is to promote 'respect and understanding about the world's religions through education and multi-faith action' and to 'show how faith can be a powerful force for good in the modern world'.

Although having a religious 'faith' means, surely, believing that yours is right, and the others are therefore wrong, Blair is under the impression that 'a world without faith would be one on a path to tragedy and disaster'. Unfortunately 'tragedy and disaster' are pretty much what we have in this world, but he seems not to have noticed that.

Numerous Christians were slaughtered by religious terrorists in Nigeria during July and August and an attack on the Central Mosque at Okene left more people dead there. 'The country is drifting fast into anarchy,' said Archbishop Nicholas Okoh.



Girls get schooled, men get scared

to a CNN.com report on 2 August. A girl's school there run by Razia Jan, an American citizen born in Afghanistan, faces the daily threat of hand-grenade, acid and poison attacks by the local opposition.

'They are scared that when these girls get an education, they will become aware of their rights as women and as a human being' said Razia Jan. It seems that some of the local men urgently need to be educated too.

So can we suggest anything that might help Tony in his spiritual quest? A quick search on Google came up with the website of the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance. This looked promising.

'We are a multi-faith group. As of mid-2011, we consist of one Atheist, Agnostic, Christian, Wiccan and Zen Buddhist. Thus, the OCRT staff lack agreement on almost all theological matters, such as belief in a supreme being, the nature of God, interpretation of the Bible and other holy texts, whether life after death exists, what form the afterlife may take, etc'.

OK, they may sound like a bunch of 60s hippies who sit around contemplating their navels and playing bongos all day, but at least they're not killing each other. Maybe Tony and his Priests and Ayatollahs should join this group.

No, it wouldn't work, would it? Oh well, back to the drawing board.

NW

Brief Reports

RESEARCHERS HAVE discovered that temperatures in Antarctica 50 million years ago were warm enough for palm trees to grow. They also point out that temperatures in Greenland are now warm enough for palm trees to grow. A climatologist commented: 'Travel companies are missing a trick - I predict Eskimo Sun Tours and Seal-Club 18-30 holidays.' A local Inuit fisherman added: 'Phew, what a scorcher. I'm down to my string vest. It's Arctantastic!'

THE DUST has finally settled and the crowds have gone home after the greatest competition of games in the modern era, with a raft of new world records set in jumping over obstacles, throwing things, batting things backwards and forwards, lots of rowing, and endless running round in circles. A spokesman for the G8 said last week: 'If only we gave out medals it would be just like the Olympics.'

AUDITORS HAVE found that the Department of Work and Pensions has been paying a company to pass dead people as fit to work. French firm Atos was paid more than £112m in the last financial year to carry out about 738,000 face-to-face medical tests on people who later turned out to be deceased. 80 percent of these dead people were pronounced 'fit and able to work'. A spokesperson for Atos pointed out that 'in any large enough sample there will be a statistically significant number of stiffs. Our staff are trained to spot benefit fraudsters, not signs of life.' Four out of 10 appeals for live claimants are upheld at tribunals.

VLADIMIR PUTIN has intervened to commute the sentences imposed on Pussy Riot activists, on condition their publicity agents come and work for him. A Kremlin aide stated earlier: 'All that celeb attention over one crap song in a church - our President would kill for PR like that.' Pussy Riot are famous for focussing the media spotlight on a number of derelict cultural icons including Madonna, Sting, Paul McCartney and Yoko Ono.

IN CHINA this month, the sensational conviction of Gu Kailai, wife of former Party boss Bo Xilai, for poisoning a British businessman, has been plastered all over no headlines and no internet websites. The controversial trial, which has thrown the Chinese Communist Party hierarchy into serious internal disarray, has not caused a media frenzy in newspapers and editorials have not blazed with wrath over the 'moral corruption' at the heart of government. Sina Weibo and Tencent Weibo, China's two Twitter equivalents, have been buzzing with no information whatsoever about the trial. Ms Gu, known as a Communist Party 'princess' in China, is facing a sentence which is unclear. Foreign journalists say they suspect 'some censorship' may be involved.

US WOMAN Diana Nyad is attempting a world record swim from Havana, Cuba, to Key West, Florida, a distance of 103 nautical miles. Nyad, who first attempted the swim in 1978, told reporters before she set off that this time she was very hopeful: 'It helps a lot that I'm being accompanied by 53,000 other Cuban swimming enthusiasts'.

No one's in control

SINCE WORLD War Two governments have adopted various policies to try to control bank lending. This, to try to make the economy work smoothly without booms and slumps or "stop-go" as it used to be called. They are still trying.

At first they tried fixing a limit on the total amount of bank loans. Then they required banks to hold a given percentage of their assets as cash and hoped to influence bank lending by increasing or decreasing this (this was known as "fractional reserve banking", though this term has since taken on a wider meaning). This in turn was eventually abandoned in favour of trying to influence bank lending by manipulating interest rates.

Over time the language changed too. Instead of talking of controlling bank lending, economists began to talk about controlling the "money supply". This led to a redefinition of money, which had previously meant currency (notes and coins issued by the state), so as to include bank and other loans. There are now at least five official definitions of money (M0, M1, M2, M3 and M4). Even so, economists have still found it necessary to maintain a distinction between "base money" and "bank money", the former being controlled by the central bank, which measures all these



M0, M1, M2, M3 or M4?

The failure of all these policies has led to a controversy among economists which is still going on. Some have come to the conclusion that the level of bank lending is linked to the state of the economy and so cannot be controlled by the central bank. This is undoubtedly true.

Banks lend more to businesses (and individuals) when the economy is expanding and less when it is not. This is being confirmed today when, despite government exhortations and incentives, the banks are not keen to lend more; they have calculated that with a depressed economy the risk of them not getting their money back is higher. Nor are established businesses keen to borrow as they know that the market for their products is stagnating.

So, on this point, these economists are right. However, some of them don't see the banks as merely reacting to the state of the economy but as contributing to it by their lending policies; they attribute to banks an autonomous power to influence the economy. This leads them to offer a purely monetary explanation of the present (and past) economic downturn, in, precisely, the irresponsible use by the banks of their ability to "create money" outside the control of the central bank.

It also leads them to offer a purely monetary solution. Here some of them have crossed the fringe to join the currency cranks in advocating a return to gold-based money (as if there weren't economic downturns when this applied) or to require banks to lend only what they've got (as if this wasn't the case anyway).

Since the economic cycle is built in to capitalism, and slumps occur when during a boom one sector overproduces in relation to its market, their reforms won't stop this any more than anything the central bank can do. The capitalist economy can be controlled neither by monetary policy nor by banking reform.

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Greenland: a new field for capitalist exploitation



OBSERVATIONS FROM three satellites showed that between July 8 and July 12 of this year the proportion of the Greenland ice sheet with melting surface ice shot up from 40 percent to 97 percent. After making sure that these astonishing data were correct, scientists attributed the melt, which continued for about two weeks, to a ridge of warm air or 'heat dome' that passed over Greenland for the seventh summer in a row.

Then on July 15 or 16 – no one noticed exactly when it happened – a chunk of ice 130 km² (50 square miles) in area toppled off the Petermann glacier in Greenland's far north-west into the Nares Strait. Less than two years had passed since August 2010, when the same glacier lost another chunk, twice as large in area.

For anyone concerned about conditions on our planet as a whole in the decades and centuries ahead, these events might be seen as yet more evidence of the worrying acceleration in the speed of global heating (atmospheric carbon dioxide has now, according to some measures, passed the 400 parts per million mark). In particular, they could herald a tens-of-metres' rise in sea level that would inundate the world's lowlands if the Arctic and Antarctic ice melted away.

Yet it can hardly be denied that climatic warming is producing immediate benefits in Greenland itself, especially for farmers and fishermen. The country is turning once more into the 'green land' that attracted Viking settlers during the Medieval Warm Period of the 9th to 13th century. The season for growing grass and grazing sheep is becoming longer. Dairy cattle have been reintroduced. Vegetables like broccoli, which never grew before at these latitudes, are now cultivated. Cod and halibut are migrating north into Greenland waters.

Greedy eyes

The big mining and hydrocarbon companies are moving into Greenland, buying up broad swathes of territory and preparing to exploit rich and newly accessible mineral resources. In the Kranefeld area, for example, the Australian-based Greenland Minerals and Energy owns deposits estimated at 861 million tonnes of uranium, zinc and rare earth elements (REEs). Another Australian firm, Hudson Resources, is drilling for REEs at Sarfartoq. These developments seem likely to play a key role in breaking up China's monopoly in the extraction of REEs, which are coveted for diverse high-tech applications (see *Material World*, May 2011).

Other companies have their greedy eyes on nickel, aluminium, precious stones – and, of course, oil and

natural gas, which they have no intention of leaving in the ground for as trivial a purpose as averting environmental catastrophe.

On the basis of experience in many other parts of the world, there is ample reason to doubt whether on balance ordinary people in Greenland will derive much benefit from exploitation of the island's mineral resources. Some of them will get jobs that will seem to them relatively well-paid, but they will pay a heavy price in pollution and ill health. Uranium mining poses special dangers. So does the toxic sludge generated by the extraction of REEs, as the people of Inner Mongolia have discovered to their cost.

At present Canadian, American and Australian mining companies appear to be in the lead, but the business press assures us that European and Asian firms are raring to get a piece of the action. European firms might derive some advantage from Greenland's continuing status as a colony of Denmark with ties to the EU. (Greenland now enjoys 'autonomy' or home rule and has withdrawn from the EU but still receives substantial aid from the EU through a partnership agreement that expires at the end of 2013.)

Independence for Greenland?

The issue of political independence for Greenland must be considered in this context. Commentators argue that the tax revenues generated by mining will enable the Greenlandic government to manage without the subsidies it now receives from Denmark and the EU, making independence possible. But whose interests would independence serve?

It is plausible to suppose that the North American and Australian companies already involved in Greenland are encouraging (bribing?) the country's politicians and officials to go in this direction. They know full well that greater independence from Denmark and the EU means greater dependence on them.

Political independence would eliminate any competitive advantage that the link with the EU might give their European rivals. It would also free them of any constraints that Danish or EU regulations might place on mining in the name of protecting the environment or the way of life of indigenous groups. Observers note that home rule has made it easier for companies to obtain licenses. Presumably, independence would make it easier still.

STEFAN



Reshuffle. Who? When? Why?

WE DO not need to be diverted but recently Vernon Bogdanor, Research Professor at King's College, shared his thoughts on the matter of David Cameron looking for a way to revive his government's sagging fortunes: 'David Cameron is an admirer of Harold Macmillan. There is quite a lot of similarity in that both went to Eton and Oxford'. And the point of this: 'Like Macmillan, Cameron's lustre is fading. He too faces grave economic problems allied to failing support in the polls and is believed to be planning to revitalise his administration with a reshuffle'. And the eminent professor's advice: 'It is important that Cameron does not let the legacy of the 'Night of the Long Knives' inhibit his own political calculations'. There are some key words in this passage: 'grave economic problems;' 'failing support;' 'revitalise;' 'reshuffle;' because reshuffling a government – throwing out some of its prominent members, shifting those that remain around between jobs and filling the resulting gaps with hungry cubs from the back benches – is well established political strategy, even though it has never produced an enduring remedy for any perceived problems.

Attlee

The Night of the Long Knives was the occasion in 1934 when the Nazis protected their recently won victory by wiping out a clutch of restless brutes in their paramilitary wing, the *Sturmabteilung*, including its leader Ernst Roehm. Bogdanor was warning Cameron against employing rather less bloody but nevertheless markedly ruthless methods familiar to political leaders in this country. An example is provided by Clement Attlee, the first post-war Prime Minister, who rode to power on a great wave of underestimation in his party. 'And a little mouse will lead them' was how Hugh Dalton, Attlee's future Chancellor of the Exchequer, had greeted his rise in 1935 to the Labour leadership. In fact, the little mouse in Number Ten was quick to sack Dalton when he unwisely leaked some minor detail of his 1947 Budget to a crafty reporter. 'Perfect ass,' was how Attlee dismissed Dalton, 'His trouble was that he liked to talk, and he always liked to have a secret to confide'. Little more was heard of Dalton and his ambitions to lead his party. Another of Attlee's ministers (who resigned but was never sacked by him) described his style as '...the tepid enthusiasm of a lazy summer afternoon at a cricket match'. But that idyllic vision was not apparent to John Belcher, junior minister at the Board of Trade, who was caught out taking what were regarded as bribes (but which would hardly rate as such in the present state of politics) for fixing governmental favours. Belcher was found to have accepted a suit, a cigarette case, a holiday in Margate (yes, Margate) from a fraudster and undischarged bankrupt. Attlee sacked him on the spot and launched a searching enquiry into the matter.

Abrasive

The wife of another ambitious minnow was furious when her husband was called to Number Ten in expectation of a glamorous promotion only to be told to clear his desk, but that meanwhile as he had an engineering qualification he might have a look at the troublesome family vacuum cleaner. Another hopeful, John Parker, was similarly disappointed but did not help his case

by gasping, 'But why, Prime Minister?' which drew the barb: 'Afraid you're not up to it'. Behind Attlee and his abrasive style were some unusually powerful government figures such as Ernest Bevin, Stafford Cripps and Herbert Morrison whose experience of running affairs during the war did not make them any more humane, or successful, in controlling the inherent aggressiveness of the system. Among their priorities was the conscription of those hopeful people, to forget the promises for the safer, freer world which was to be built from the terror and destruction of 1939-45 and go to fight for the interests of British capitalism in Korea, Kenya, Cyprus...

Macmillan

It was one such conflict – the disastrous invasion of Suez in 1956 - that effectively raised Harold Macmillan to the position of Prime Minister. This was the time when, we were told, we had 'never had it so good' such that a Tory election win in 1959 brought about the reign of somebody known as Supermac. But then came the predictable decline as the economy entered a less easy spell, raising questions about Macmillan's durability. In America, the election of the youthfully virile JFK made the Tories seem older and more frail. Then came the crucial blow, when the safe seat of Orpington in Kent was lost to the Liberal Party in a by-election. Nothing could be more calculated to stimulate subversive restlessness among the back benches and there were insistent calls for Supermac to stand down. Although Macmillan nourished the reputation of a Gentleman



To His Fingertips (Eton, Balliol, Grenadier Guards), he decided to be so ungentlemanly as to pin the blame for the rampant chaos onto his ministers, in particular his long-standing friend and enduringly loyal and willing Chancellor of the Exchequer, Selwyn Lloyd. He plotted a reshuffle but this was hastened by a leak in the *Daily Mail*, so it was necessary to call Lloyd to Number Ten to tell him he was to be sacked (Macmillan preferred 'replaced'). On the following day another six members of the Cabinet were fired, then nine junior ministers. Surprisingly the Tory Party rode out the expected storm and Macmillan, resigning through health problems, was allowed to influence the choice of his successor .

Douglas Home

This was the aristocratic Old Etonian land owner Alec Douglas Home who fulfilled all expectations by being unable to make any headway against the day-to-day pressures of capitalist politics and lost the 1964 election to Harold Wilson, the ex-grammar schoolboy with the thick Yorkshire accent. It was an instructive, if unedifying, episode. So now, almost fifty years after Macmillan and his Long Knives and seventy years after Attlee and his ruthless cosh, can it be that our 'progress' is so meagre that it must be measured by an eminent professor speculating about the application of some stale, infected poultice to the chronic ulcers of capitalist society and its politicians? Those who claim to instruct us seem to be unaware that Cameron and his like offer nothing different or more searching or hopeful than a harking back to their own dismal failures. This is, simply, not the best we humans can do and the urgency for us is to demand better for ourselves as a revolutionary class.

IVAN

Power to the

Is the first anniversary of the Occupy Movement this month something to celebrate? With a bit of perspective, we can now look at its tangible achievements and limitations

'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' George Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (1905)



The background to 2011 was one of weak class consciousness, let alone socialist consciousness. Inequality remained firmly off the political agenda. The message from the millionaire ruling class was 'We're all in this together'. Ed Milliband's challenge to the austerity myth was merely that the cuts were too deep and too fast. Little surprise then that cuts to welfare were implemented relatively free of political impediments.

Then in Spain, protests calling for 'Real Democracy Now!' and to 'Take the Square' formed the inspiration for *Adbusters* magazine to call for similar protests in the United States. It asked, 'What is our one demand?'

'In the weeks leading up to Sept. 17, the NYC General Assembly seemed to be veering away from the language of 'demands' in the first place, largely because government institutions are already so shot through with corporate money that making specific demands would be pointless until the movement grew stronger politically. Instead, to begin with, they opted to make their demand the occupation itself—and the direct democracy taking place there—which in turn may or may not come up with some specific demand. When you think about it, this act is actually a pretty powerful statement...' (Reproduced in *Occupied Wall Street Journal* 1).

This was the start of the Occupy Movement, with the core slogan, 'We are the 99 percent'. Various organisations participated in starting it, although Occupy remained much broader than any of them.

The methods of Occupy were not

totally without precedent even in the last few decades. Back in the 1990s, the Zapatistas had used horizontalism for decision-making. One slogan that was used, 'Another World is Possible,' also recalled the comparable international impact of the protests against the G8 in Seattle. These protests inspired the Anti-Globalisation movement (subsequently renamed Alter-Globalisation) which petered out, although Indymedia and World Social Forum proved more sustainable.

Occupy is formed along non-hierarchical lines. Its decisions are taken by consensus in general assembly and in smaller working groups. Its commitment to organising without hierarchies seems to have so far deterred vanguards from hijacking it, as happened in the anti-globalisation movement. Regular (mostly weekly) General Assembly meetings have been held in London since its inception and despite repeated evictions from the Stock Exchange, St Pauls, Finsbury Park and Hampstead Heath.

Despite protests from unions, Occupy Oakland was able to partially mobilise for a march of 40,000 people. Occupy London occupied an abandoned bank building and created the venue, Bank of Ideas. They were evicted from that, but they had also formed the Tent City University to organise more talks. Several significant publications have emerged from Occupy locals around the US and UK including propaganda sheets such as *Occupied Wall Street Journal*, *D.C. Mic Check*, *Occupied Chicago Tribune*, *Boston Occupier* and *Occupied L. A. Times* as well as much lengthier

papers such as *Occupied Times of London* and *Occupy! Gazette* by n+1 (literary journal publishers).

The ideological support for austerity was challenged, the genie was out of the bottle and, worse still for the 1 percent, opinion polling showed favourable attitudes to the Occupy movement. The 1 percent establishment were forced to respond.

Co-option by the 1 percent?

In the US, the Democratic Party seem to be targeting Occupy for co-option, using initiatives such as a '99 percent declaration', '99 percent Spring', 'Occupy Congress' and 'Occupy the Dream'. Although Occupy, seeking political support from the electorate isn't necessarily harmful, Glenn Greenwald comments:

'they are going to try to convert OWS into a vote-producing arm for the Obama 2012 campaign, and that's what 'Occupy Congress' is designed to achieve. I believed then and — having spent the last few weeks talking with many OWS protesters around the country — believe even more so now that these efforts will inevitably fail: those who have animated the Occupy movement are not motivated by partisan allegiance' ('Here's what attempted co-option of OWS looks like', Salon.com).

The members of Bush Snr's administration, which Colin Powell is alleged to have called 'the crazies', are the now powerful neoconservative strain which has chosen to attack Occupy. Dirtier muckraking smears of the 1 percent than those in the film, *Occupy Unmasked*, would be hard to

99 percent



find. The trailer seems to suggest that Occupy is hierarchical, astroturfed and nihilistic. However, just because some participants may have such ideas, does not mean they should be taken as representative of Occupy. Only those agreed by the general assembly can. Whether the controversial body called the 'Spokes Council' in *Occupy Wall Street* makes their movement hierarchical remains to be seen.

Divisions within Occupy

The most controversial argument within Occupy in the US seems to have been between Chris Hedges and David Graeber:

'The Black Bloc anarchists, who have been active on the streets in Oakland and other cities, are the cancer of the Occupy movement. Black Bloc adherents detest those of us on the organized left and seek, quite consciously, to take away our tools of empowerment. They confuse acts of petty vandalism and a repellent cynicism with revolution. The real enemies, they argue, are not the corporate capitalists, but their collaborators among the unions, workers' movements, radical intellectuals, environmental activists and populist movements such as the Zapatistas. Because Black Bloc anarchists do not believe in organization, indeed oppose all organized movements, they ensure their own powerlessness. They can only be obstructionist. And they are primarily obstructionist

to those who resist' (Chris Hedges, *The Cancer in Occupy*, 6 February 2012, Truthdig.com).

To which David Graeber replied:

'I have on more than one occasion taken part in Blocs where property damage has occurred. (I have taken part in even more Blocs that did not engage in such tactics. It is a common fallacy that this is what Black Blocs are all about. It isn't.) I was hardly the only Black Bloc veteran who took part in planning the initial strategy for Occupy Wall Street. In fact, anarchists like myself were the real core of the group that came up with the idea of occupying Zuccotti Park, the '99 percent' slogan, the General Assembly process, and, in fact, who collectively decided that we would adopt a strategy of Gandhian non-violence and eschew acts of property damage. Many of us had taken part in Black Blocs. We just didn't feel that was an appropriate tactic for the situation we were in' (David Graeber, *Concerning the Violent Peace-Police, An Open Letter to Chris Hedges*, 9 February 2012, n+1).

Like the World Socialist Movement, Occupy does not seek to impose its object on unwilling participants. It aims rather at facilitating the diversely ideological 99 percent to freely arrive at ideas. The above controversy demonstrated the need for a space to develop those sometimes conflicting ideas. This is where *Tidal Magazine* (OccupyTheory.org) comes in. In depth but plain-speaking and free from jargon, Tidal argue, 'We believe we

can't have radical action without radical thought'.

Occupy is important since it is rare to arrive at an analysis of the class composition of society close to that of the World Socialist Movement but popularised independently. And it is anti-Leninist too.

For us, socialism is the best system for the interests of the 99 percent. For Occupy as well as for those who want socialism, the twin dangers are of treading the path of reformist demands (which would undermine the 99 percent core message), or the path of inevitably doomed insurrection, which was the fate of the Paris Commune of 1871.

Politics has come a long way since the era of the reforms demanded by the Chartists in the 19th century. The manifestos of *Real Democracy Now* and the *Global Occupy Manifesto* demonstrate that these have chosen the reformist path. If the iterative *Initial Statement of Occupy London* continues 'veering away from the language of 'demands' they may be able to avoid this mistake.

China's first modern capitalist premier Zhou Enlai is reputed to have said in 1972 it was too early to judge the significance of the French Revolution of 1789. Though the quote is thought to be misinterpreted, hopefully, this opinion rather than Santayana's is more applicable to the green shoots of the Occupy Movement, still in its infancy.

DJW

The first mass movement in history

The Chartists struggled for political democracy in nineteenth-century Britain, but did they need a “revolutionary leadership” any more than we need one today?

The Chartist movement, which lasted from 1836 to the 1850s, has been described as the first mass workers movement in history. In some ways it was. Chartism was a movement composed mainly of the working class that demanded the enactment of the People’s Charter, which would grant the vote to working class men.

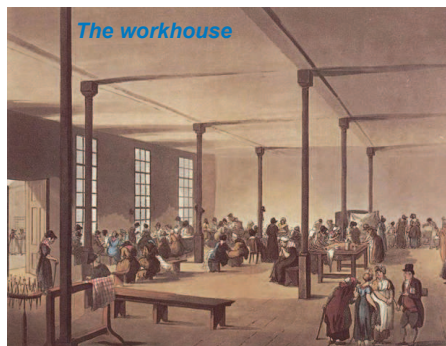
The vote had been extended to a wider section of the propertied in 1832 amidst widespread fears of unrest. Propertied political radicals, who had previously courted working-class support to advance the extension of the suffrage to them, declined to endorse further extension; supported the Poor Law of 1834, which instituted the workhouse; backed vicious anti-trades union prosecutions; and refused to repeal the newspaper ‘tax on knowledge’. Unsurprisingly, a surge of working class consciousness and independent political organization was the result.

Within this new movement were strands of thought associated with individuals such as James ‘Bronterre’ O’Brien, George Julian Harney and Ernest Jones that stressed the need for the Charter ‘and something more’, which anticipated the later development of revolutionary socialism.

Working class consciousness and the democratic-socialism (at this time meaning variants of Owenite socialism) of many of the supporters of Chartism were only elements of a diverse movement. Rather than an early mass workers movement it is more plausible to see Chartism as a popular movement in which these elements were significant developments. Hence the survival of older radical forms such as the prominence of the ‘gentleman leader’ in the movement, exhorting the working class from the orator’s platform, and utilising the threat

of force as the dominant strategy. Prominent in this respect was Feargus O’Connor, a radical Irish aristocrat, whose oratory and newspaper, the *Northern Star*, dominated early Chartism and defined the mainstream of the Chartist movement.

There were others in the movement who, although often desiring the ‘something more’ that they anticipated would result from the Charter, wished to moderate the element of social threat. These ‘moral force’ Chartists were exemplified by the London Working Men’s



Association which was influential in the early stages of the movement, and drew up the People’s Charter with the assistance of the wealthy political radical Francis Place. By taking a moderate approach they hoped to draw in the support of propertied political radicals who wished to advance the suffrage for their own ends such as abolition of the Corn Laws and free trade. The Birmingham Political Union, for example, was an important body in the early stages of Chartism, through which it hoped to advance the currency crank ideas of its leading member, the wealthy capitalist Thomas Attwood. This section dropped out of the movement, however, (along with most of the other early propertied supporters) when the gravity of the movement

shifted towards the industrial centres, and the working class presence and the tone of social threat increased.

The increasingly resolute working class presence on the national political scene was expressed at the other extremity of Chartism by those on the ‘physical force’ wing of the movement who wished to fan the flames of insurrection. Their approach was characterized by the deployment of extreme and provocative language to threaten the propertied into granting the Charter, backed up with secret organization and insurrectionary zeal. Exhortations for the people to arm were commonplace and intimidating torch-light processions took place in some localities (until they were banned). It is debatable to what extent many on this side of the movement really believed in the possibility of successful armed insurrection, but by 1839 this section was increasing in influence.

The insurrectionary element in the Chartist movement has fascinated left-wing historians who see in it a frustrated revolutionary potential from which a modern vanguard can learn lessons. Adding to this literature is a new history of the Chartist insurrectionaries of 1839 by David Black and Chris Ford (1839 – *The Chartist Insurrection*, London, Unkant Publishing, 2012, £10.99). It is a compelling read, telling the story of Chartism through the experiences of George Julian Harney and other ‘firebrand’ Chartist leaders such as Dr. John Taylor and examining the ill-fated Newport Rising of 1839. The authors provide a vivid account of the revolutionary potential that had built up in Britain by the late 1830s, culminating in the aborted rising at Newport in which several Chartists were killed.



A successful rising in south Wales may well, as the authors claim, have resulted in a chain of risings. Their claim that it would have achieved "world historic importance" is questionable though. It may have extracted compromises on focal points of working class struggle such as the Ten Hour day, the poor law, bread prices and land monopoly. It may even have achieved further extension of the suffrage. But Black and Ford accentuate the existence of working class insurrectionaries in south Wales and elsewhere and not the rising's shambolic failure in the face of a state resolutely set against the prospect of armed revolt by the Chartists. Indeed, the perceived threat of insurrection set the propertied against the Chartists in a way which the threat posed by their radical political demands did not. It was the overt social threat of:

'peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must', that meant the Chartists had to be defeated by the government on behalf of the propertied, even if ultimately its

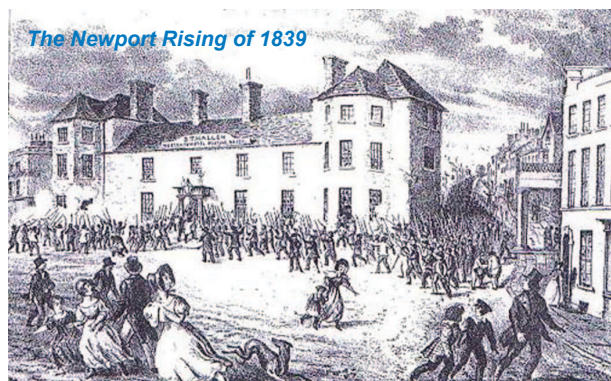
political demands could be conceded.

The authors seem disappointed at what they see as the paucity of revolutionary leadership within the Chartist movement. The proposed general strike in support of the Charter is regarded as a failed revolutionary opportunity because Feargus O'Connor refused to see it as a chance for the "revolutionary seizure of power." Black and Ford argue that "the strike had an inexorable revolutionary logic: with no strike fund to draw on, the people would have to violate bourgeois property rights in order to eat" (pp.88-9). But most Chartists did not want a revolutionary seizure of power; they wanted an extension of the vote backed by the *threat* that if it was not granted then 'force' *might* follow. Chartist leaders such as O'Connor did not want a showdown with the state via a general strike because he knew that the likely consequence would be defeat.

John Frost, the leader of the Newport Rising, is likewise characterized as a somewhat reticent and indecisive insurrectionary leader, not because he fell short as a revolutionary leader of proletarian

revolution but because he did not see himself in these terms to begin with. He did not anticipate having to actually use force but believed, in line with the mainstream of the Chartist movement, that the threat of force would be sufficient to achieve Chartist objectives. He found himself a 'gentleman leader' in a situation that escalated way out of his control. The Chartists at Newport, however sincere, walked into a confrontation that led to deaths and a subsequent display of the strength by state in which hundreds of arrests of Chartists were made across the country and John Frost, a broken man, was transported to Tasmania (a sentence of death having been commuted).

The authors suggest that Chartism was neither the tail end of radicalism nor the forerunner of socialism. But it contained plenty of the old in with



John Frost

the new. In their words, "In 1839 the ideas of Thomas Paine stood in dialogue with the socialistic ideas of Thomas Spence, Robert Owen, Bronterre O'Brien and Gracchus Babeuf" (p.199). Chartism was: "a conscious attempt by working-class insurgents to resolve ... [capitalist] crisis by breaking the power of 'Old Corruption'" (p.198). This is followed by the claim that "the movement undoubtedly did have revolutionary and socialist tendencies which persisted and developed" (p.199). It is clear that the intellectual inheritance of Chartism was a mixed bag of traditional radicalism and new Socialism. In trying to tell the story of insurrectionary Chartism, however, Black and Ford want to highlight a working class consciousness that is ripe for insurrectionary revolution. In so doing, although the story they tell was part of the Chartist movement, they highlight some voices in the movement at the expense of others.

Labour MP, John McDonnell, in the foreword to the book suggests that Black and Ford reveal that the threat to the British political establishment, even of revolution, in Britain in 1839 was closer than is often realized. This

is indeed the main achievement of the book. But McDonnell also claims that the authors reveal a history that is suggestive of a possible "alternative revolutionary route" (p.xi) that could have been taken by British labour. This is to see a nascent revolutionary potential for seizing political power in the movement for democratic reform. Democratic reform, however, was expected, by those struggling to bring it about, to involve a significant shift in political power in favour of the working class and harmful to the propertied. Such a shift was anticipated, by supporters and opponents of the Charter alike, to result in measures beneficial to the working class. If revolution was on the agenda it was intended to achieve democratic reform from which the working class would benefit, not to advance a 'proletarian' vanguard.

Black and Ford conclude that we

should salute the Chartist insurrectionaries and seek to understand why they did not succeed in 1839. It is suggested that a major reason for their failure was weak revolutionary leadership. But, today, we have few

positive lessons to learn from the bloody failure of past insurrections; less still do we need revolutionary leadership. Rather than inspiring an investigation into how such struggles can be harnessed by an enlightened cadre, it is the limitations of insurrection as a strategy for social change that strikes us. Armed insurrection was not necessary or even useful to the cause of democratic reform in Britain.

We should, of course, salute the Chartists but from a different perspective. They made bold and courageous sacrifices in the face of the determined opposition of the British state on behalf of their propertied opponents. And it is thanks to the struggles of the Chartists and of those who came after them that insurrection is more than ever a moribund revolutionary strategy. Since the late nineteenth-century the working class has possessed the political means to effect social and economic change. It is high time that we, the working class, had the confidence and knowledge to use those means for ourselves.

CSK

Tom Paine and today

Tom Paine is still invoked today from Obama to some in the Occupy Movement.



IN HIS inauguration speech in 2009, President Obama quoted from Paine's patriotic rallying call *The Crisis*, and during his election campaign he quoted from Paine's *Common Sense* which advocated American independence. In 2012, Obama presented Bob Dylan with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 1963 Dylan received the Tom Paine Award for his work in the Civil Rights movement. Later, Dylan wrote *As I Went Out One Morning* referencing Paine. Paine proposed the abolition of slavery in his *African Slavery in America*, authored the proposal's preamble for the Pennsylvania Assembly which abolished slavery in 1780 and later supported the Haitian Black Jacobins.

Paine's book *Rights of Man* laid the foundations for bourgeois liberalism: freedom of property, commercial enterprise (a kindred spirit was Adam Smith), limited government, reduced taxation, advancement based on merit, productivity and industriousness. The bourgeoisie were a revolutionary class; the severed heads of Charles I and Louis XVI are testament. Paine attacked the "chivalric nonsense" of monarchy and aristocracy for: its privilege and hierarchy, based on heredity; its corrupt government; taxation; wars; and its stifling of economic innovation.

EP Thompson called *Rights of Man* "the foundation text of the English Working Class movement" although it was in *Agrarian Justice* that Paine pushed bourgeois radicalism to its limits. He believed that poverty was caused by 'bad' government, and proposed welfare provision to be paid for by progressive taxation on landed property. He also believed that the dismantling of the war machine would bring savings which could go to the "hordes of miserable poor" and thereby reduce taxation on the bourgeois class. Paine did see that the accumulation of property in the hands of a few would cause poverty, but he was a bourgeois liberal and believed: "That property will ever

Bomb for Tom: a B-17 named after Tom Paine



continued page 22



America's political landscape is drearier now that two cantankerous radicals are gone.

Late July saw the deaths of Alexander Cockburn (b. 1941), a radical muckraking journalist, and Gore Vidal (b. 1925), historical novelist, essayist, playwright, and two-time political candidate. Each was something of a one-man political tendency – viewing himself as of the Left, as it's called, but willing to question leftist assumptions and engage with those inhabiting that other imaginary political zone, the Right.

To the purebred liberal or conservative, with feet planted squarely on the either bank of the Mainstream, the politics of Cockburn and of Vidal could seem irresponsible, irrelevant, or just irritating. Loyal Democrats never forgave either man for supporting Green Party candidate Ralph Nader in the 2000 presidential election.

The liberal magazine *American Prospect* still nurses that wound; its editor Harold Meyerson bluntly titled his Cockburn obituary, "The Man Who Hated Liberals," writing that, "contempt for liberals and social democrats was a hallmark of Cockburn's work . . . it informed, if that's the word, [his] attacks on Al Gore and his paeans to Ralph Nader during the 2000 presidential campaign."

The (more or less) liberal *New Republic* gave Vidal an even rougher going-over in its obituary, "Where Have All Our Racist Aristocrats Gone?" – and reminded readers of old Vidal feuds related to his criticism of Israel and its treatment of the Palestinians; a position he shared with Cockburn, and which earned them the label of "anti-Semite."

Conservative magazines were not especially sad to see them go, either; *The Weekly Standard*, begins its obituary of Vidal with guns ablaze: "The most puzzling thing about the career of Gore Vidal, who went toes-up last week at 86, was the reverence in which he was held by people who might have known better."

Yet there were also those on the Right who were fond of Vidal or Cockburn: some liked how they regularly laid into liberals, while a few thought that behind the radicalism was a true conservative yearning to breathe free. "Libertarians" (anarcho-capitalists), in particular, viewed Vidal and Cockburn as kindred souls. Justin Raimondo, founder of the libertarian website, antiwar.com, praised Vidal as the "last Jeffersonian". And he questioned the use of the term, "radical leftist" in obituaries of Cockburn (who was briefly an antiwar.com columnist): "He was radical, all right,

but as for the 'leftist' – I have my doubts"; describing him instead as "a paleo-radical who had survived long enough to be considered a reactionary."

The obituaries of Vidal and Cockburn written by the "radical leftists" themselves were full of praise and a few criticisms. The International Socialist Organization hailed Vidal as an "uncompromising critic of America's rulers" on its website (socialistworker.org), while noting that his "politics were not without their flaws." The same organization praised Cockburn as a "modern-day muckraker" who "never stopped speaking truth to power," but proceeded to list a number of "points where we . . . disagreed with him, sometimes very sharply." Indeed, Cockburn deviated sharply from the radical Left a final time just weeks before his own death when he pronounced the Occupy movement dead of its own incoherence.

This talent Vidal and Cockburn had for winning friends and enemies across the Left and Right divide struck many as contrarianism in the style of Christopher Hitchens, their erstwhile comrade. But their politics were more radical and coherent than Hitchens's ever were, even in his lefty prime, and their apparent "contrarianism" was more a result of sticking to their guns than seeking attention for its own sake (although both relished a good fight).

The populist and the radical

Vidal and Cockburn were not political clones by any means. A difference between them in background and generation clearly affected their politics. Vidal's starting point was the Democratic Party at the tail-end of the New Deal, while Cockburn came out of the radicalism of the 1960s. One noteworthy similarity is that the politics and personal ambitions of each were strongly influenced by a close family member.

For Gore Vidal, the influential figure was his grandfather Thomas Gore, a Democratic Party senator for the state of Oklahoma (1907–21; 1931–37). As a child, Vidal spent countless hours reading to his blind grandfather from weighty tomes on bimetallism and constitutional history or from *The Congressional Record*. Through this political education Vidal assimilated the political outlook of Senator Gore, which had been shaped by his participation in the short-lived People's Party ('Populist') movement of the 1890s. This had arisen out of southern farmers' anger against the power of northern railway monopolies and banks. Even after joining other Populists in 'fusing' with the Democratic Party, Gore continued to oppose banking and railroad interests, and he voted against the party leadership at crucial times (to his own political detriment): he opposed Woodrow Wilson's call for involvement in World War I and Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal legislation. On top of this, he was an unabashed atheist. But whether Thomas Gore belongs on the Left or Right is anyone's guess. The senator's fiscal conservatism would win cheers from today's Tea Partiers, certainly, but his blaspheming the Holy Trinity (war, banks, and God) would sound like 'commie-talk' to the ears of the Republican and Democratic faithful.

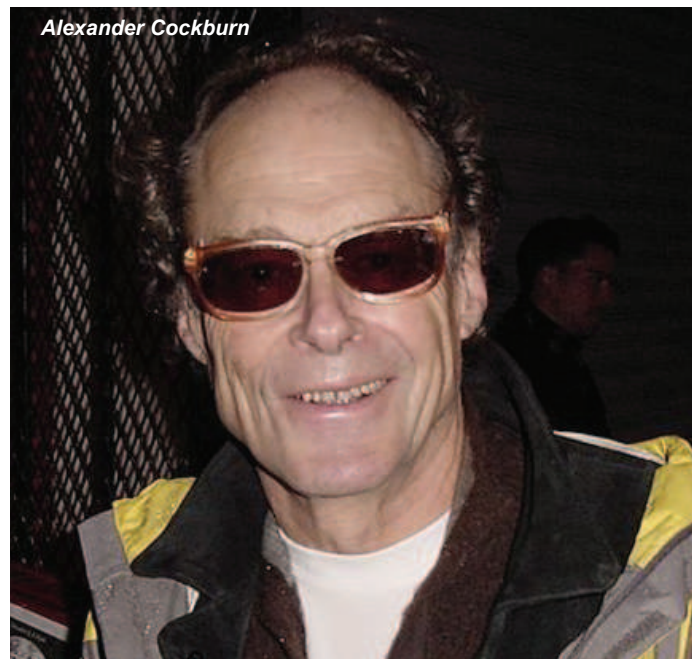
By the late 1940s, when Gore Vidal gained fame as a novelist, there were not many populists in the mould of Thomas Gore left in the Democratic Party. But Vidal remained a Democrat, even running for Congress on the Democratic ticket in 1960 (on a platform of taxing the rich) and in a Senate primary in 1982. Vidal did not simply inherit his grandfather's beliefs: he was no foe of the welfare state, as was clear from his campaigns. Yet the general influence of the old Populist politics is unmistakable. And in interviews Vidal often described his politics as Populist, bewildering anyone who knew his

patrician ways better than his politics.

In the early 1970s, Vidal co-chaired the anti-war 'People's Party' coalition, and was already saying around the time that, "There is only one party in the United States, the Property Party . . . and it has two right wings: Republican and Democrat." In subsequent years, Vidal in his political activity and writing was consistently opposed to American militarism and empire-building. The gradual transformation of the United States from a "republic into an empire," as Vidal puts it (as do libertarians), was the central theme of his *Narratives of Empire* series of historical novels, for which he is best known as a writer.

For Alexander Cockburn, the influential family member was his father, Claud, a radical journalist who joined the Communist Party in the 1930s and stayed with that outfit until 1947. At the time of Alexander's birth, Claud was editing a muckraking newsletter called *The Week*, described by Graham Greene as the intellectual inspiration for *Private Eye*, which Cockburn also edited, in the 1960s.

Cockburn idolized and modeled himself after his father, whom he called the "greatest radical journalist of his age"; this influence determined his decision to enter journalism. In the 1960s, Cockburn worked for the *New Statesmen* and other publications in London, where he was also on the editorial board of *New Left Review*. In 1972 he moved to the United States, where he wrote



first for the *Village Voice* and later for dozens of other publications, including *The Nation*, for which he wrote his long-running column, *Beat the Devil* (named after Claud Cockburn's pulp novel of the same title). And in the 1990s, he also started to edit the muckraking newsletter (and website) *CounterPunch*.

Alexander Cockburn tended to make light of Claud's rather long time spent in a Communist Party, usually by recounting one of the humorous anecdotes his father had told him of that experience. He recalled, for instance, how his father once encountered a jargon-riddled passage in the *Daily Worker*: "The lower organs of the Party must make even greater efforts to penetrate the more backward parts of the proletariat," and worried it "would be construed by the masses as a dirty joke." Such anecdotes seemed intended to underscore how Claud was a most unorthodox Communist – and, of course, to get a laugh.

But the joke falls a bit flat when we see how the dead weight of dear old Dad's "Old Left" dogma held Alexander back, at times. For all his exposure to Sixties radicalism,

there was a soft spot in Cockburn's heart for Communists and he quoted Lenin enthusiastically right up to the end. Worst of all, he mistook some of the state-capitalist countries for post-capitalist ones, an assumption that was fatal to his ability to understand the meaning of socialism. Cockburn's criticism of the Occupy movement just before he died applies equally to his own reform-focused politics:

"There also seemed to be a serious level of political naivety about the shape of the society they were seeking to change. They definitely thought that it could be reshaped – the notion that the whole system was unfixable did not get much of a hearing."

And often the twain shall meet

Despite their different political backgrounds, there are key positions that Cockburn and Vidal held in common. First, both opposed US militarism and its wars around the globe. They also denounced the erosion of civil liberties and authoritarian abuses of the state. The third principle that animated their politics was an opposition to 'corporate power' – particularly the power of large banks.

All three of these positions would seem to merit the Leftist label for them, but a second thought (and the memory of Senator Gore!) might even raise some doubts on this score.

Anti-war would seem a Lefty view, certainly, but the 'isolationists' were associated with the Right. And in the eyes of Leftists, there have always been good and bad wars. Opposing corporations would seem a sure mark in the Left column, again. But the old Populist's opposition to banking and railroad giants reflected the interests of agricultural capital. And today as well, opposing big business can be the ideology of the small-fry capitalist struggling to become a big shot. Even in the case of civil liberties, one could point to how Leftists often lead the charge against 'hate speech' and call on the state to limit the expression of 'dangerous ideas.'

The dividing line between Left and Right on a specific issue seems clear at a given time, but it is always shifting over time, revealing the essential meaninglessness of the two categories. None of that seems to matter much to reformist activists on both sides who judge your politics according to what positions are taken on the 'hot-button' issues of today, adding up the checks in the Left and Right columns to calculate your political score.

The positions Vidal and Cockburn took on some of the issues of the day certainly had Leftists scratching their heads in confusion, or their chins in suspicion.

One example was their indifference (but not outright opposition) to gay marriage, which both found a boring issue. Vidal's position came as a surprise to many, for he was an open "homosexualist" (with prickly precision he thought the term 'homosexual' should only describe the act and not define the person), had fought against homophobia long before it was a popular cause and lived for decades with his partner Howard Austen. The reasons Vidal and Cockburn gave for their position were the exact opposite of the right-wing view that gay marriage "threatened the sanctity of marriage." Vidal quipped that "heterosexual marriage is such a disaster, why would anyone want to imitate it?" And Cockburn said it would make more sense to "figure out how to relieve heterosexuals of the outdated shackles of matrimony," while ridiculing the Right's notion gay marriage would, "bring the whole edifice of Western civilization crashing down." Even though their position on gay marriage is glibly expressed, and its practical consequences for individuals are dubious, it was nonetheless based on a radical view of marriage (in general) as a reactionary institution.

Another jaw-dropper for Leftists was Cockburn's position on global warming, namely his belief that, "There is still zero empirical evidence that anthropogenic production of carbon dioxide is making any measurable contribution to the world's present warming trend." This is of course a scientific issue, not a narrow political one and must be judged on scientific grounds. But however cranky his science, Cockburn's political reasoning on the issue is, again, that of a radical. He described the "turn to climate catastrophism" as "tied to the decline of the left's optimistic vision of altering the economic nature of things through a political programme" and its belief that the "emergency response [to a catastrophe] will lead to positive developments in terms of social and environmental justice"; whereas Cockburn believed "environmental catastrophism will - in fact it already has - play into the hands of the sinister-as-always corporate interests."

Even at their cantankerous worst, which was when their wit was often best, Vidal and Cockburn held positions that were arrived at through independent thought. But in reformist politics the reasons a person gives for a position matters less than the political company he or she seems to keep in holding it.

Not radical enough?

"Why is a question the media are trained to shy away from. Too dangerous. One might actually learn why something had happened and become thoughtful." (Gore Vidal)

The willingness to ask that question, even when it might lead in an uncomfortable direction, brought Vidal and Cockburn into conflict with Leftists, not to mention liberals and conservatives. That is not to imply that they always arrived at a convincing answer. (Vidal in particular was far too willing to flirt with conspiracy theories during his last decade.) In posing dangerous questions, though, they shook many out of their complacency; in their writings, one senses an independent, probing mind in action.

Yet despite this fearless questioning of assumptions, I don't think either asked enough (or good enough) "why questions." Even when they grasped why something had happened, they did not necessarily "become thoughtful" enough to recognize why similar somethings kept happening, over and over. Not why this or that war occurred, for example, but why war itself continually springs from the soil of capitalism, or why economic crises reoccur ever few years. Instead, they were too prone, as they tirelessly raked through the muck of American society, to pin the blame on rotten individuals or a public too apathetic to stop them.

By not asking the second, third, or fourth "why" question" so as to dig down to the root of a problem, Vidal and Cockburn were not as radical, in the literal sense of the word, as they should have been; they remained reformists who only sought to reshape capitalism. Vidal and Cockburn could have learned useful things from genuine socialists about questioning their own political and social assumptions.

But socialists have much to learn from Vidal and Cockburn, too. Their way of expressing unpopular or controversial ideas with verve and confidence is worth emulating; as is their ability to write in jargon-free English for a wide audience without spoon-feeding the content or sacrificing wit; and having skin thick enough to weather criticism, and a pen sharp enough to pierce it. All of these qualities are useful to 'contrarians' propagating the still unpopular idea that capitalism must be replaced by a new form of society.

MICHAEL SCHAUERTE



Billy Bragg: not looking for a new England

love a Man in a Uniform, dissected war and capitalism. This song came too late for Billy Bragg because in 1981 he had joined the British Army. He had not worked out an analysis of capitalism and war and the fact that the working class do the killing and dying in capitalist wars.

After the end of the Miners' Strike in 1985, Bragg's next campaign was Red Wedge which was a pop music collective dedicated to electing the Labour Party and getting Neil Kinnock into Downing Street. Bragg told Coles that Red Wedge was 'hardly revolutionary, it was Neil Kinnock'. Kinnock was already expelling from the Labour Party Trotskyists such as Militant and beginning the modernisation process that would eventually result in New Labour. In 1987 Thatcher was elected for the third time.

After the 1987 election, the next stop for Billy Bragg was joining the newly formed pressure group, Charter 88, which had been set up by Liberal/SDP intellectuals. Charter 88 would eventually merge with the New Politics Network (which had evolved from Democratic Left which was, in turn, the 1991 successor to the defunct Communist Party of Great Britain) and form the pressure group Unlock Democracy.

Barking Abbey Comprehensive School also produced Malcolm Eden and Tim Gane who formed the indie pop band, McCarthy, in 1985 who were explicitly a Marxist group that sang about socialism (*Red Sleeping Beauty*), the socialist commonwealth (*Celestial City*), while their 1987 album, *I am a Wallet*, was all about capitalism and commodity fetishism in Thatcher's Britain

When McCarthy split in 1990 Tim Gane teamed up with French singer, Laetitia Sadier, to form *Stereolab*. Sadier told *Melody Maker* in 1991: 'I want to change the world' and *Stereolab's* lyrics had a Marxist content. One song called *Ping Pong* in 1994 was a Marxian economic analysis of capitalism's crises. A 1992 song, *Surreal Chemist*, identifies the Marxist perspective of *Stereolab*:

'Even more than philosophers/Aiming at no less than the total transformation of man and his world/ True life embodying pleasure principle's noblest triumph/Over the cowering mendacity of bourgeois christian civilisation'.

In 2005, Bragg supported Oona King MP (New Labour, pro-Iraq war) in her election campaign in Bethnal Green and Bow in East London against the maverick Leftist, George Galloway. She was defeated. New Labour had so abandoned the working class in East London that the far-right BNP gained seats on Barking Council.

The rise of the BNP in his native East London prompted Bragg to write his 2006 book, *The Progressive Patriot*, where he champions English

nationalism and multiculturalism and even draws inspiration from Rudyard Kipling (he of the British Empire and 'the White Man's Burden' whose propaganda egged on the slaughter of millions of the working class in the trenches of the First World War). Bragg has no class analysis society and writes he is 'developing a narrative which explains how we all came to be here *together* in this place' (my emphasis) and states we now live in a 'present classless society'. He does not see that the capitalist ruling class seek to convince the working class that 'we' is 'the Nation' and the Nation state is run by the capitalist class in their interests. He does not see 'multiculturalism' from

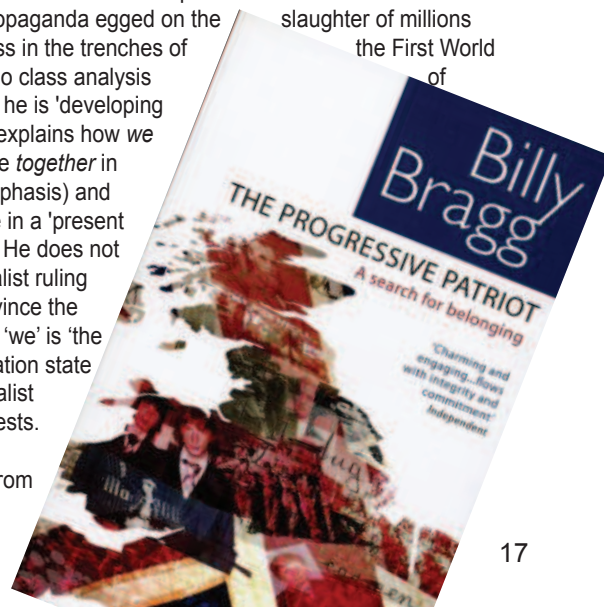
1984 WAS the year of the Miner's Strike and Billy Bragg. He identified himself with the Miners' struggle against the Thatcher Tory government. In fact, Bragg says that Thatcher made him who he was. His album *Brewing Up with Billy Bragg* contained a song called *The World Turned Upside Down* about the Diggers and Levellers of the English Revolution of 1649 who advocated the 'common treasury' of the earth, the title of the song referencing Marxist historian Christopher Hill's book. All proceeds from Bragg's EP, *Between the Wars*, were donated to the Striking Miners' Fund.

In April, the Reverend Richard Coles invited his old Red Wedge comrade, the 'Bard of Barking', Billy Bragg, onto his Saturday Live Radio 4 show, introducing him as 'the British Left's most consistent voice'. Bragg's consistency has been as a reformist, gradualist, and non-revolutionary voice. The *Guardian* (1 January last year) declared that Bragg had 'an unshakeable commitment to democratic socialism'. Is the term 'socialist' an accurate description for this Dorsetshire denizen?

Bragg was brought up in Barking in East London, experiencing 'the reality of working class experience not the theoretical' and attending Barking Abbey Comprehensive School. He was energised by the Punk Rock explosion of the late 1970s, stating he was politicised by seeing The Clash at the Rock Against Racism carnival in Victoria Park in Hackney in 1978. The Clash were notorious for radical chic Leftist gesture politics such as wearing Red Brigade/Baader Meinhof T-shirts, and eulogising the Leftist Nicaraguan Sandinista government.

Bragg would have been better politicised if he had seen the Gang of Four confronting British Movement skinheads at Thames Poly in Woolwich in 1979. The Gang of Four were a Marxist post-punk band originating at Leeds University who were influenced by the Frankfurt School, and wrote about love, sex and leisure as fetishised commodities in capitalism, and alienated labour. In 1982, their single, /

'I never advocated the abolition of capitalism' (Billy Bragg, Radio 4, 21 April)





Some hits, but no knockout

a socialist angle, which views it a divisive because it forces the working class to identify with other groups against their class interests.

Since 2001, Bragg has stated that he is a tactical Lib-Dem voter but feels betrayed by the Lib-Dems being in the Coalition government with the Tories: 'They had some positive things in their manifesto, and they seem to have abandoned the lot of 'em'.

Bragg told Reverend Coles in April that 'there are no utopias, I was never that kind of revolutionary. As if I've ever called for the abolition of capitalism'. He agreed with Coles that his was 'a modest programme of change, chipping away at that which is tractable'.

Last year he told the *Guardian*: 'We're living in a post-ideological period' and that 'the long shadow of Karl Marx' was over, and of the new protests he did not 'care if it's called socialism'.

STEVE CLAYTON

Bakuninist anarchist writer Hans Jaeger. His *'Evening on Karl Johan'* shows an oppressive crowd of bourgeois middle-class people with uncommunicative faces constrained by their norms and values.

Munch's most famous work *'The Scream'* can represent human alienation in bourgeois capitalist society. Marx identified that humans are alienated from their work, their fellow humanity, and from nature itself; in fact, the proletariat is *'annihilated'* which can be seen in the horror of the figure in *'The Scream'*. *'The Scream'* can also represent a person experiencing synaesthesia - the union of the senses - a feature experienced by some artists, those in the stages of madness or under the influence of LSD. Munch wrote that he had been 'trembling with anxiety and I sensed an infinite scream passing through nature,' which also has echoes of Kierkegaard's Christian existentialism. Munch's *'The Sun'* is also startling in its synaesthesia, and evokes William Blake's visionary pictures. Psychological 'heaven and hell' were all too familiar to Munch. *'The Scream'* evokes the plight of the sane man in an insane

society which Erich Fromm identified. He also pointed out that the solution lay in a sane socialist society.

Shortly before his mental breakdown, Munch completed *'Friedrich Nietzsche'*, a posthumous portrait of the philosopher whose ideas about existential authenticity and eternal recurrence can be elicited from a study of *'The Scream'*. Nietzsche posited the theory of eternal recurrence as 'the greatest weight' which could be with 'amor fati,' the ultimate affirmation of life, and guarantee an existential authenticity or lead to a terrifying nihilism.

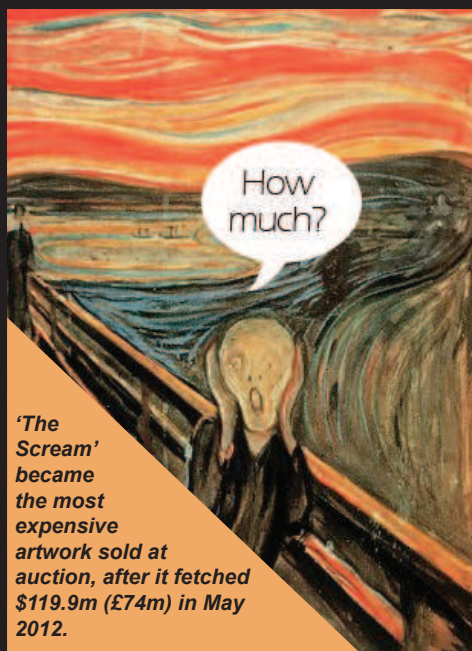
Nietzsche was admired by anarchist Emma Goldman who wrote of him as the champion of the self-creating individual advocating spiritual renewal, and she combined this with the anarchist communism of Kropotkin. Nietzsche himself loathed the state, capitalism, 'herd morality', and Christianity as all exhibiting a lack of the 'nobility of spirit'. The alienated working class in bourgeois society has no self-esteem; it does not have a high estimate of itself, being in the grip of false consciousness. In Nietzschean terms, the working class 'is the dwarf of himself... a god in ruins', and what is needed is a 'transvaluation of values': a class consciousness to create a new man and woman in a socialist society.

Antigone, the woman of personal courage confronting state oppression has been a source of inspiration for dramatists. For Brecht she was the symbol of popular resistance to the horrors of Nazism. For 'The Living Theatre' founder, Judith Malina, Antigone 'speaks with an ancient voice that is present wherever there is a willingness to speak against



Edvard Munch at the Tate Modern

EDVARD MUNCH'S art portrays alienation, angst and madness in bourgeois capitalist society at the beginning of the 20th century. Munch grew up in a world turned upside down by Darwin, Nietzsche, and Karl Marx. Norway witnessed the development of feminism, and the changing role of women is seen in plays by Ibsen. Munch portrays his ambivalence about this sexual revolution in works like *'Ashes'* which evokes a sense



of sexual guilt, and *'Madonna'* which is a hybrid of Ophelia and Salome, although his *'Sister Inger'* portrays a strong, independent woman.

Munch lived in the bohemian milieu in Christiania which was infused with socialism, and opposed the complacency, hypocrisy and reactionary nature of bourgeois middle-class society. He was friends with

'The Scream' became the most expensive artwork sold at auction, after it fetched \$119.9m (£74m) in May 2012.

'Antigone' by Sophocles at the National Theatre

THE GREEK tragedy *Antigone* by Sophocles was recently staged at the National Theatre in London, starring Christopher Eccleston as Creon and Jodie Whittaker as Antigone, the character Hegel described as 'the heavenly Antigone, the most magnificent figure'. This production opens with a tableaux modelled on the photograph of President Obama and aides watching the live video feed of the killing of Bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011.

conventional strictures and punitive laws and to invoke the boundless human potential'.

Athenian audiences in the Hellenic Enlightenment would have adopted a more nuanced approach to *Antigone*, one that was based on the society they were living in. Marx and Engels identified Ancient Greece as a society based on slavery, where agriculture was still developing, the 'polis' (city state) and private property had appeared, and a ruling class was based on land and slave ownership.

In 5th century BC Athens, a form of 'democracy' had developed with a franchise that extended only to male citizens (with no say for slaves and other non-citizens). Athens was run by Boards of Jurors (who were salaried, chosen by lottery, and subject to scrutiny and de-selection), and the Council of 500 (chosen by lottery and examination with restricted tenure). Neither were organs of representative government. The source of direct democracy was in the People's Assembly where any citizen could vote and speak. The Assembly met 40 days a year, had a quorum of 6,000 and drafted all major legislation.

Antigone, as an individual set against the tyranny of the state in the person of Creon, was appreciated by Athenian audiences because only 70 years before there had been authoritarianism. The play's major themes can be seen as divine/natural law against man-made/state law or private/family life versus public life/citizenship.

JH Bradley in *Hegel's Theory of Tragedy* saw the dialectical conflicts in the ethical views represented by Antigone and Creon. Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit* sees sibling fidelity and the sister-brother relationship ('mutually self-affirming free individualities') as the strongest possible relationship for a woman within circumscribed family life. In Athens women did not have the vote; they were legally dependent on men, and in the case of Antigone her male guardian is also Creon. Athenian audiences would appreciate the depth of her rebellion not only against the state but also against a man. Hegel identified gender politics, and that patriarchy creates 'an enemy within its own gates'. Hegel adores Antigone and believes her to be nobler than Creon.

Sophocles does not have the gods save Antigone, and in Tiresias's prophecy there is no praise for Antigone. Creon loses his wife, and his ward Antigone, but it is the loss of his son that is the patriarchal tragedy. For Sophocles and Athenian audiences it is the hubris of Creon which causes this tragedy.

STEVE CLAYTON



Going for growth

WHEN MERVYN King announced on 8 July that the Bank of England was predicting zero growth for 2012, Chancellor George Osborne pledged that the government would now devote a 110 per cent effort to creating growth. But how?

Growth is defined as an increase in Gross National Product (GNP). This is made up of three things: business investment, government expenditure and consumer spending. So, in theory, growth could be brought about by increasing any of these. In practice, however, it can only come about through an increase in business investment. This is because this is what drives the capitalist economy, but it only takes place in the pursuit of profit. When it contracts or stagnates this is a sign that profitability has fallen. Growth won't take place again till this is reversed.

When there is a slump the obvious solution seems to be to increase consumption by giving people more money to spend. Keynes wasn't so naïve but he did provide an economic theory that justified doing this. So it is fair to say that the Keynesian solution to a slump is that the government should intervene to increase both its own spending and consumer demand.

When this was last tried in Britain by the Labour governments of the 1970s it didn't work, but merely led to 'stagflation', i.e. rising prices but no growth. The then Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, had to confess at the 1976 Labour Party Conference:

'We used to think that you could just spend your way out of a recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you, in all candour, that that option no longer exists and that in so far as it ever did exist, it only worked on each occasion since the war by injecting bigger doses of inflation into the economy, followed by higher levels of unemployment' (*Times*, 29 September 1976).

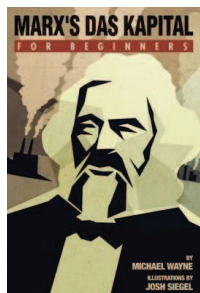
The fallacy behind this policy, still advocated by Labour left wingers and the Green Party, is that it assumes that capitalism is an economic system geared to meeting paying consumer demand whereas it is in fact an economic system geared to making profits to accumulate as capital. Profits are the key to growth not government and consumer demand.

In a slump there is a fall in consumer demand but this is a consequence of an increase in unemployment due to a fall in profitable investments. This is why government action to increase demand does not work. Only an improvement in profit prospects, leading to an increase in business investment, will bring about an inevitably gradual exit from a slump. Various things that happen in a slump help to bring this about. Lower wages, lower interest rates, a fall in the value of fixed assets and the elimination of unprofitable firms all help to restore profitability. So does a reduction in taxes. In fact, insofar as a government does not decrease its spending and so taxes to finance it, this can prolong a slump.

To apply Keynesian remedies in a slump could even make things worse. Not that the present government has any intention of doing this. They can pledge to 'go for growth' as much as they like but unless profits recover there will be no growth.

Marx

Marx's Das Kapital For Beginners by Michael Wayne;
Illustrations by Sungyoon Choi.
www.forbeginnersbooks.com. US
 \$16.99. 138pp.



This little book is on the whole an excellent and handy introduction to the ideas of Karl Marx. Most of it is quite readable and fairly easy to follow, and pretty accurate in its summary of

Marx's *Das Kapital*. It also touches on a number of his other books in passing. Its main virtue is that it succeeds in showing some of the ways in which Marx's ideas are in fact as relevant as ever today, despite the widespread myth that he was discredited by the events of the twentieth century.

Marx analysed the social and economic system he lived under in studious, methodical detail by starting from the very categories used by the bourgeois economists themselves: the commodity, the exchange of commodities and then, most important, the buying and selling of labour power, which is at the core of the system of wage-slavery, a system we still live under in 2012 throughout the world. Marx solved the paradox of the origin of profit created in the production process. He did so, as explained very well by Wayne, by distinguishing labour from labour *power*. The latter is the worker's ability to work for a given number of days, whereas simple labour is the work performed during this time. If you pay someone a wage of £500 per week, that is what they need to live on and carry on being fit for work. You have bought their labour power for the week. But they will be able to generate £500's worth of value well before the week is over, and the surplus belongs not to them but to the employer.

The chapter on 'Reproduction And Crises' is both the weakest and most problematic, as Wayne allows himself to get bogged down in the tortuous debate as to exactly how it is that capitalism runs periodically into crisis, and whether there is an underlying tendency for such crises to get worse over time. Within the Socialist Party we have sometimes debated among ourselves about

the precise mechanics of this. Wayne leans, at times, toward an 'underconsumptionist' description of capitalism, which is flawed as it neglects to take account of the "purchasing power" of capital itself. He also gets lost in some dubious mathematics and loses track of how little some of this matters as against the urgent need to end capitalism, however its crises are caused. He redeems himself, however, by the well-chosen summary that "the overall anarchy of the market" is the ultimate cause of crises.

Given the gross distortions and misrepresentations of Marx's ideas sustained through the twentieth century Russian experience of Bolshevism, Leninism, Trotskyism and Stalinism, it might have been apt to devote at least a page or two to noting how Lenin twisted Marx's ideas for socialist revolution into his manifesto for minority-led insurrection to establish industrial capitalism in Russia in the early twentieth century. This laid the groundwork for the Stalinist dictatorship which followed and did incalculable damage to the progress of genuine socialism in the world today because it was done under the banner of "socialism" and "Marxism" rather than being named more honestly as the capitalist revolution that it was.

Instead, Wayne devotes a disproportionate six pages of his 138-page book to extolling the virtues of the Italian intellectual Gramsci as a kind of missing link. This, like Wayne's pessimism about the transformation to socialism (see below), arises from a lack of conviction that 'ordinary' members of the working class can have the ability to reach socialist consciousness themselves, as a simple and direct result of their own experience of capitalism. He shares with Gramsci the arrogant assumption that a special category of 'intellectuals' (including presumably Wayne as well as Gramsci) have the historical role of teaching the workers about the exploitation they are experiencing.

Perhaps the best and most thought-provoking chapter here is that on 'Commodity Fetishism And Ideology'. Wayne explores Marx's fascinating insights about the way in which social relationships in capitalism are skewed by the power given to objects and the force of economic imperatives. This is a very rich seam which Marx opened, and is still worthy of much further research and exploration. This is about the ways in which our present social

system increasingly causes personal misery, alienation, depression and cultural implosion, all of which are becoming more and more pressing issues in our present era.

There is a grave disappointment in the final pages of Wayne's book. Having usefully outlined some of the positive ways in which socialism will liberate humanity from the limitations of the market system, he then abandons the revolutionary agenda to state that once production for need and collective control of production arrives, 'various forms of collective ownership and control would grow, while both the state and the market for labor power would diminish. This could only take place over what presumably would be a long period of transition, spanning many generations' (page 135).

In support of this 'gradualism' he quotes Marx (page 132) saying that "the time which society is bound to devote to material production is shorter...in proportion as the work is more and more evenly divided among all the able-bodied members of society, and as a particular class is more and more deprived of the power to shift the natural burden of labor from its own shoulders to those of another layer of society..."

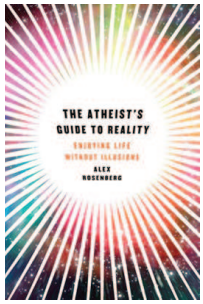
Looking at the original German and the French translations of this passage (at the end of chapter 17 of Volume I of *Capital*), however, it appears most likely that Marx was not using the phrase "more and more" to imply a gradual change over generations, but simply to make a mathematical point about proportions. In much the same way it might be explained that the more you remove the air from a fragile container the lower its pressure, and the more and more likely it is to smash. This does not mean you are proposing that such a container might have a half-an-half vacuum for generations.

In fact, once we have a majority who understand that capitalism has outlived its usefulness, the change from capitalism to socialism will be enacted, pure and simple. You just cannot have the co-existence of socialist and capitalist relations of production in the world for any significant period of time, and certainly not for generations. This should be clear to Wayne and his readers from every observation throughout the rest of his book about the all-encompassing global nature of capitalism and, by extension, of the very different system which must replace it.

CLIFFORD SLAPPER

Reality

The Atheist's Guide To Reality by Alex Rosenberg. Norton, 2011



A frustration shared by socialists and many scientists is the persistence of belief in a god to explain the world. This is partly because 'god' is such a quick and easy answer to so many

important questions: How did we get here? Why should I behave morally? Why am I here? While science has provided a comprehensive explanation of how and when we got here, and what we are made of, it is less certain when answering the question, why? Instead, many people have turned to religious or other unfounded explanations. This potentially leaves a gap in the atheist's belief system. How can the scientifically-minded atheist explain issues like morality and purpose? In *The Atheist's Guide To Reality*, Alex Rosenberg aims to prove that science can explain these matters. He argues that a consequence of science – and physics, in particular – is that we should abandon many of our fundamental assumptions.

Science – especially neuroscience – has explained the workings of our brains, and this entails that

we abandon the concept of a 'soul'. Moreover, science requires that we should also jettison related concepts like 'mind' and even 'self'. As our brains are organic machines, they function by responding to learned inputs with predictable behavioural outputs. So, it is wrong to describe the brain as a 'soul', 'mind' or 'self'. Self-awareness and even consciousness are just by-products of non-conscious, involuntary functions of the brain. This also means that the thoughts, intentions and meanings we attach to ourselves aren't really about anything; they're just mechanical processes. And therefore we lack free will, as well as a mind and a self.

According to Rosenberg, evolution by natural selection has led to our false assumptions about ourselves. Our ancestors survived long enough to reproduce by using the most expedient beliefs and explanatory frameworks, regardless of whether they were correct. Now, science has exposed how wrong these assumptions are, and atheists should adopt a different way of thinking about life.

Rosenberg says that this should lead to 'nice nihilism', a stance which combines niceness (which has been evolutionarily advantageous) with no longer believing in moral facts. He doesn't devote quite enough space to discussing the political implications of his theory. He says that his science-based outlook should encourage "a fairly left-wing

agenda" (p.292). But while he says we should act co-operatively and helpfully towards others, he also argues that we shouldn't believe we have any purpose. This is not only because science doesn't need non-physical concepts like 'purpose', but also because it doesn't use narratives, like we use to explain how we live. So, history, sociology and politics are based on false premises, and should only be seen as a type of entertainment.

Rosenberg's fascinating, imaginative theory is argued clearly and convincingly. If he is right, then science requires us to rethink all our beliefs about ourselves. He claims that future scientific developments won't discredit his argument, as the basics of physics are already known. But if we've got the physics right, should we agree with what Rosenberg says? By downplaying the role of politics – and, by extension, economics – in favour of science to explain the world, he ignores how science is itself influenced by economic forces. It is these forces and their impact on our ideologies which shape science and how we view it. Rosenberg's views are also influenced in this way. So, science is not the objective, all-encompassing explanatory framework he believes it to be. Despite this, his argument remains persuasive and important to all Marxists and atheists. Exercise your free will by reading it for yourself.

MIKE FOSTER



Tory Teenagers

LEAVE A Petri dish in Oxford or Cambridge and chances are it will spawn a few young Conservatives along with other bacteria. The universities there have always been

infected with teenage Tories, and two

of these irritating germs featured on *Young, Bright And On The Right* (BBC2). Cameras followed them both as they tried to gain influence in their respective Oxbridge University Conservative Associations – CUCA and OUCA.

Joe Cooke hangs portraits of Thatcher and Churchill on his bedroom wall, where other teenagers might have posters from *Nuts* magazine. Nineteen-year-old Chris Monk describes himself as "a wild firebrand of the right". Alas, he's too 'wild' to ingratiate himself among CUCA, with his flailing arms, gawky demeanour and strange obsession with cheese and port. The most striking thing about each of them is their voice. Chris speaks in a whiny gargle, like Boris Johnson with a helium balloon. Joe's decided to dilute his Yorkshire accent to fit in better with his

posh, plummy peers.

Both want to start playing among the infighting and intrigue they find in their Conservative Associations. In their minds, they're practising for when they're in Parliament. In reality, they're behaving like they're in a sixth-form drama production of *Yes, Minister*. The game turns more serious when Joe gets revenge on those who mocked his real accent. He goes to the papers with evidence that OUCA sang racist and anti-Semitic songs at their meetings. He says he's now seen through their "warped reality".

Young, Bright And On The Right reveals that both Joe and Chris have grown up feeling isolated, and this led them to seek acceptance in the Conservative Party, of all places. Why there, rather than anywhere normal people go? Perhaps feeling some resentment towards their peers has contributed to their joining an organisation famed for trampling on people. It's as if Conservatism is a symptom of their teen angst. Thankfully, it's a phase both Joe and Chris should grow out of. By the end of the programme, they've both abandoned their political aspirations. Hopefully, in years to come they'll be suitably embarrassed about being young, bright and full of shite.

MIKE FOSTER



Anonymous Teenager and idol

Meetings

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

Central London

Wednesday **5 September**, 7.00pm
BANKING REFORM OR ABOLITION OF CAPITALISM?

Debate between Positive Money (Ben Dyson) and the Socialist Party (Adam Buick). Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

East Anglia

Saturday, **15 September**, 2 - 5pm
MARX, MYTH AND MONEY

Speaker: Pat Deutz
Nelson Hotel (opposite the train station), Prince of Wales Road. Norwich NR1 1DX
The meeting room can be accessed by going through the Costa Coffee Café and down the stairs. The room is towards the Prince of Wales Road end.)

Chiswick

Tuesday **18 September**, 8pm
FUNNY MONEY THEORIES
Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace, W4 4HH (nearest tube: Chiswick Park).

Glasgow

Wednesday, **19 September** 8.30pm
THE TORY PARTY
Speaker: Vic Vanni
Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow G20 7YE

Manchester

Monday **24 September**, 8.30 pm
WHO IS TO BLAME FOR THE RECESSION?
Unicorn, Church Street, City Centre, M4 1PW

East Anglia

Saturday, **29 September**
12noon: informal chat / branch business
1pm - 2pm: meal
2pm - 4pm: branch business / ADM agenda
Quebec Tavern, 93-97 Quebec Road, Norwich, NR1 4HY (The meeting takes place in a side room separate to the bar.)

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from page 14

be unequal is certain". Marx saw the "rights of men to property" espoused by Paine and adopted in the USA as "not based on the union of man with man but on the separation of man from man", and that the *Rights of Man* did not go beyond egoistic man: "it is not man who appears as a species-being; on the contrary, species-life, society, appears as a framework extraneous to the individual".

Today, Paine's bourgeois liberalism would be offended by the existence of monarchy, and the aristocracy still in government. The Prime Minister is related to the Queen and is a descendent of William IV, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer is an 'Anglo-Irish Ascendancy' aristocrat.
STEVE CLAYTON

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

Fascism and ignorance

ONCE AGAIN, there is a demand that the Fascists in this country should be legally banned. This demand comes most strongly from what we can loosely call the Left Wing. A legal ban was their answer to the Fascists before the last war; they are, it seems, always wanting to ban something. It is no surprise that, as soon as the Fascists come in for some unnecessary publicity, the Left turn their attention momentarily from the bomb to the Blackshirts.

It is easy to see why the Left Wing, which mistakenly regards itself as consisting of democratic socialists, is so often eager to try to ban some other organisation's ideas. They have always firmly embraced the idea of leadership, by which they mean leadership of the working class to some vaguely defined destination by some dubiously knowledgeable Left Wing politicians.

An essential of the leadership theory is the political ignorance of the unlucky people who are to be led. Leadership, in fact could not exist without blind and ignorant followers. The followers, reason the leaders, cannot be trusted to resist the temptations of race hate and totalitarianism. It is a waste of time to try to educate them. Like children who are kept away from a case of chicken-pox, the working class must be quarantined from the infection of fascist ideas.

Like any other favourite Left Wing theory, this one starts off on the wrong foot and never recovers from it. The working class do not need any more leaders to decide what ideas they may and may not come into contact with. Capitalism is full of leaders, pulling this way and that and all achieving nothing towards the solution of our problems. It is high time for the working class to wake up from their slumbers.

It is high time for them to get some knowledge of capitalism. They need to know how capitalism works. Why it breeds ugly and destructive ideas like Fascism. Why it can never solve its own problems. Why its leaders are powerless to staunch its course.

(From editorial, *Socialist Standard*, September 1962)



ACTION REPLAY

Meanwhile...

WHILE THE world has been focusing on the Olympics and the European Football Championships, plenty of other sport-related events have been taking place:

- International football transfers fell in the first half of 2012, their total financial value going down by a third. So perhaps even the super-rich owners are beginning to feel the pinch.

- The head of the Professional Footballers' Association called on players at Portsmouth to accept less in past (so far unpaid) and future wages to keep the club from going under.

- In Glasgow, Rangers have been forced, in effect, to start again as a new club (or, in some views, an existing club but a new company) in the Third Division after owing massive amounts in tax. There have been claims that there is an 'anti-Rangers agenda' in many parts of Scottish football (Daily Record website, 8 July); presumably these are people wanting to get their own back at a leading club.

- The National Football Museum (for England, that is) used to be at Deepdale, the historic stadium of Preston North End. But Preston is a small city, a long way from anywhere, and after financial muscle from a bigger set-up, the museum has now transferred to Urbis in Manchester, a building which had spectacularly failed in its original use as a 'museum of the city'. Big-money transfers aren't just of players.

- The Brazilian congress passed a bill allowing the sale of beer during matches in the 2014 World Cup there (beer sales are otherwise illegal at football matches in Brazil).

- In English rugby there has been a spat between clubs in the Championship (the second tier) and the Rugby Football Union, with the clubs claiming the RFU owes them money. A number of clubs are already in financial difficulty.

- Trainers withdrew their horses from a hurdle race at Worcester, as a protest against inadequate prize money, partly caused by bookmakers locating their on-line business offshore and so reducing the amount of betting levy paid to the racing industry.

In other words, sport, and business, as usual.

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Voice from the Back

The Future Is Bleak

One of the illusions beloved of supporters of capitalism is that although workers may suffer some social problems these are gradually lessening and the future will see them disappear. The following report seems to knock that notion on the head. 'Struggling consumers spend the equivalent of one week a year worrying about money as personal debt soars, says a study. With families facing the toughest squeeze on living standards since the Twenties, it found the average

person spends three hours and 15 minutes a week fretting over finances. The *Which? Quarterly Consumer Report* into how we are coping with the downturn says more are being forced to take on new forms of debt to make ends meet' (*Daily Mail*, 24 July).

Progressing Backwards

Politicians, supported by the mass media are always telling us that capitalism is the most efficient way to run modern society. Inside Europe as the economic crisis worsens that claim looks more and more insupportable. 'Some 5.7 million Spaniards, equivalent to almost

one in four, are now seeking work, according to official figures. The country's unemployment rate rose to 24.6% during the April to June quarter, up from 24.4% during the previous quarter. That is the highest rate since the mid-1970s, when the right-wing dictator Francisco Franco died and the country reintroduced democracy' (*BBC News*, 27 July). Forty years of so-called progressive democratic capitalism and one in four is unemployed - some progress!

Homelessness At Home

We can read every day about the super-rich acquiring a new third or fourth house in some exotic part of the world at some ridiculous price, but less prominent in the media you can also read of less fortunate workers who are without a house of any sort. 'The number of households declared in need of emergency accommodation in England rose by about 25% over the past three years, new figures suggest. Ssentif, the data company, said some 50,290 families and individuals were classed as homeless in 2011/12, up from 40,020 in 2009/10. But, said the company, spending on tackling homelessness had fallen from £213.7m to £199.8m over that period' (*BBC News*, 31 July). The plight of the homeless is another glaring example of the class division that exists in such so-called modern, developed countries like Britain.

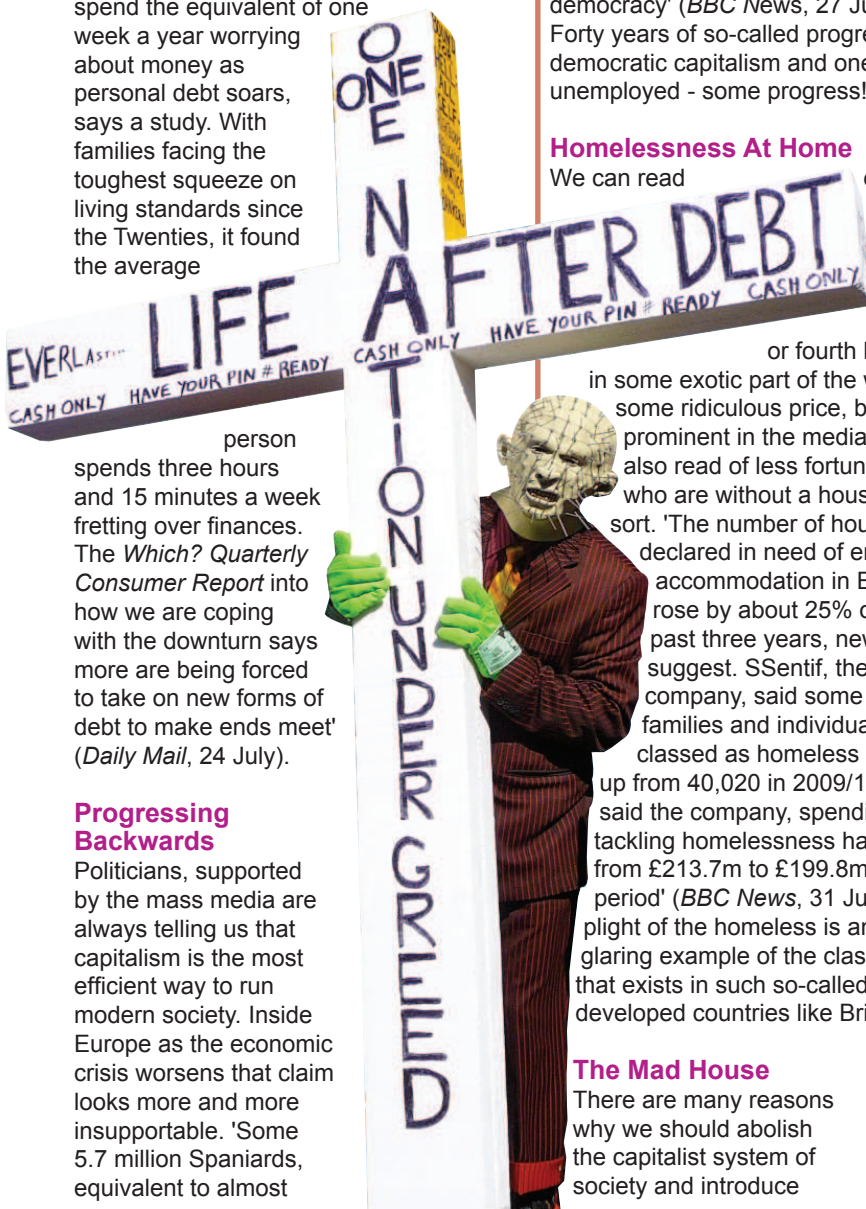
The Mad House

There are many reasons why we should abolish the capitalist system of society and introduce

world socialism, but surely there is no greater reason than this. 'An unparalleled number of severe food shortages has added 43 million to the number of people going hungry worldwide this year. And millions of children are now at risk of acute malnutrition, charities are warning. For the first time in recent history, humanitarian organisations have had to respond to three serious food crises – in West Africa, Yemen and East Africa – in the past 12 months, according to Oxfam. Almost a billion people are now hungry – one in seven of the global population – and the number of acutely malnourished children has risen for the first time this decade' (*Independent*, 5 August). Millions starve in a world capable of feeding everyone. Capitalism is a mad house.

Profits Before Humanity

Capitalism is a cruel, unfeeling society wherein profit is much more important than human compassion. 'A private care home for severely disabled people put its own profits before basic humanity, a scathing inquiry into abuse has found. Regulators, police, social services and the NHS are all heavily criticised in an official report for failing to pick up warning signs about the treatment of patients at the Winterbourne View home in Gloucestershire. It was published after 11 members of staff at the home pleaded guilty to almost 40 charges of neglect and ill treatment of people with severe learning difficulties in their care' (*Daily Telegraph*, 7 August). The scandal only came to light after an undercover reporter for the BBC's *Panorama* programme filmed abuse taking place after being tipped off by Terry Bryan, a former senior nurse. The footage showed frail and confused residents being forcibly pinned to the ground by groups of staff, beaten, soaked with water, trapped under chairs and having their hair pulled and eyes poked. Yes, capitalism is truly a 'caring' society!



FREE LUNCH

