

# socialist standard



June 2010  
Vol. 106 No. 1270  
£1.50

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

## Team UK 2010

I give us six months

I'll give tax breaks to the rich

The Con-Lib coalition, p10



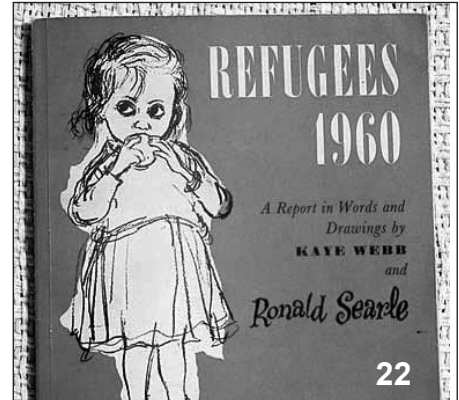
Analysing  
Harvey  
page 12



Racing to the  
bottom  
page 14



Wilberforce  
and Huxley  
page 18



## FEATURES

- 10 Political whores trading**  
The Holy Grail and the poisoned chalice
- 12 The crisis: what is to be done?**  
We look at David's Harvey's latest book *The Enigma of Capital*.
- 14 The race to the bottom**  
Could Western corporations do without sweatshop production?
- 16 "Listen, lady . . ."**  
*The anger was palpable, the body language unmistakable – our driver was one very pissed-off guy.*
- 17 How shall we vote?**  
Part of the deal for the Tory-LibDem coalition government is that there's to be a referendum on electoral reform. But is electoral reform really necessary?
- 18 Darwin on human evolution**  
A 150 years in June the famous confrontation over evolution took place between Bishop Wilberforce and TH Huxley. We begin a three-part series where we look at Darwin's theory of human evolution and the reaction of Marx and Engels to it.

## REGULARS

- 3 Editorial**
- 4 Pathfinders**  
Blow out
- 6 Material World**  
Christian Fascism
- 7 Tiny Tips**
- 8 Pieces Together**
- 8 Contact Details**
- 9 Cooking the Books 1**  
How Capitalism Works
- 15 Cooking the Books 2**  
What's a "Living Wage"?
- 20 Reviews**  
*The Real Venezuela; Why We Cooperate; The Selfish Genius.*
- 22 Meetings**
- 22 50 Years Ago**  
Refugees
- 24 Voice from the Back**
- 24 Free Lunch**

### SUBSCRIPTION ORDERS

should be sent to The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.

### RATES

One year subscription (normal rate) £15  
One year subscription (low/unwaged) £10  
Europe rate £20 (Air mail)  
Rest of world £25 (Air mail)  
Voluntary supporters subscription £20 or more.  
Cheques payable to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain'.

### THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 5 June** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.  
tel: 020 7622 3811  
e-mail: [spgb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb@worldsocialism.org)

## 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.

## Editorial

### Michael Portillo tells the truth

The time between the close of polls on general election day and before the return to 'business as usual' is an interesting one politically. It's a brief space of freedom from bullshit, and the mainstream media reports it fairly well. Politicians are briefly free from the need to hoodwink voters (the votes are in and being counted) or to dress up business exploitation and war in the language of individual liberty and choice (that's on tomorrow's agenda). If you listen carefully during this brief period of freedom, you'll hear our political masters tell it as it is. We hope all those people who voted for the main political parties were paying close attention.

Take the former Tory MP and cabinet minister Michael Portillo, for example, interviewed by BBC News on 8 May after the general election. An important part of the 'socialist case' is to propagate the 'capitalist case', stripped of the fine words and verbiage, among ordinary working people, so they can be informed about exactly what it is they are voting for and unconsciously working to support. They will then be in a better position to make informed, democratic choices. Our candidate in the general election was not interviewed by the BBC, but Portillo was kind enough to put the Socialist Party's case (or at least aspects of it) for us.

Portillo said that, whatever else was going on behind closed doors in the negotiations about who was to form the next government, there was one key issue that that government would have to face – namely, the economy and the deficit. And on this point, said Por-

tillo, it didn't really matter which party formed the government: Britain's policy would inevitably be dictated by 'events' in the market, and by the actions of international 'investors' (the capitalist class). In other words, what was more important than the result of the democratic process was the needs of a small minority of humanity to find profitable investment opportunities, and the democratic process was inevitably subordinated to that fact.

The BBC interviewer, who had perhaps been daft enough to fall for all the pre-election spin and bullshit, expressed surprise at this comment, and reiterated the propaganda point that the parties *did* differ on this issue, disagreeing about the timing of the Thatcher-style cuts in public services that all parties had promised. Portillo haughtily dismissed this, and said the timing would be dictated to the government by those all-powerful 'investors'.

On this issue, Portillo was putting the Socialist Party case. We agree with him that democracy under capitalism is all about choosing between different management teams, all of which are committed to serving the interests of 'investors', however much they may differ in style and on other comparatively minor points of policy. That means that, whoever you vote for, the government faithfully promises to put first the interests of the rich minority who profit from investment, not the majority who work under their control for a relatively meagre wage. That's the 'capitalist case', and you should bear it in mind next time you head to the polls.

# FREE

## 3-month trial subscription offer



Journal of the Socialist Party of Great Britain

YES, I WOULD LIKE A 3 MONTH FREE TRIAL SUBSCRIPTION TO *The Socialist Standard*

Name

Address

Postcode

Country

**socialist standard**

**RETURN TO: Socialist Standard, FREEPOST, London SW4 7BR**



## Blow-out

The deep-water blow-out currently gushing gigantic quantities of crude into the Gulf of Mexico threatens at the time of writing to be the biggest environmental disaster in US history, and already the blame slick is reaching into every inlet and niche of government and the oil industry.

The fact that there could conceivably be industrial disasters in socialism means that, for socialists, the big question is how we would manage affairs better. What, if anything, would a democratic, communally-managed global society do different?

In the first place, we would have to ask whether we are really so desperate for oil that we are willing to maintain an industry now recognised as one of the most dangerous in the world. In a moneyless society, who would volunteer to risk their lives, when other sources of energy remain untapped, unexplored or undeveloped? There have been 858 fires and explosions, and 55 deaths, in the Gulf since 2001, yet new drilling licences have been granted every year by the hundreds. Many of these, like the one BP got for Deepwater Horizon, are a 'categorical exclusion' exempting the operator from scrutiny by the Environmental Protection Agency and intended only for projects where environmental damage in the event of failure is expected to be 'minimal or non-existent' (*New Scientist*, 15 May).

Even supposing that socialism could not break the addiction to oil, a very large supposition indeed and one too great to explore here, the question arises whether as a responsible collective we would dare push the drilling technology to its limits and well beyond our knowledge and ability to recover from a catastrophic failure. What is striking about this affair is the lack of preparedness shown by all parties. The Gulf spill is at nearly twice the depth required to crush a Navy submarine, making direct human intervention impossible. The blow-out preventer failed. The huge 125 tonne containment dome failed. The robot-teams trying to shut off the valves failed. The secondary drilling shaft may work but will take another two months. The 'plume' problem was not anticipated. The injection of dispersant at the well-head had never been tried, and may have contributed to the plume problem. Even the amount of oil coming out has been consistently underestimated, with BP at first playing for a safe 1,000 barrels a day, then later revising this to 5,000 while independent researchers estimate between 5 and

14 times as much as this (*Guardian*, 17 May).

BP have been criticised already for this downplaying and reluctance to provide information, but it's easy to see their motives. In socialism there would be no stock market share-price to consider, or corporate image to protect, or litigation to avoid, all of it leading to a tendency to talk down the scale of the disaster and be tight-lipped with information in the interests of damage limitation. BP stock prices have fallen sharply, its 'green' image is in tatters, and already over a hundred lawsuits in Louisiana have been consolidated into a class action which will sue BP for hundreds of millions, a figure itself dwarfed by the cleanup costs which BP are of course trying to offload onto the Swiss company Transocean who ran the Deepwater Horizon rig.

"It is incumbent upon us to inform all of our neighbours, not just the islands, but those countries that could be affected by disasters that happen within our territorial waters", says the US State Department (*BBC Online*, 19 May). Perhaps pro-capitalists will miss the irony here but socialists certainly won't. In socialism these neighbours would have been consulted, and the risks made known, before any drilling went ahead, not merely informed after a disaster which they had no say in preventing.

It is also not likely that, given wide consultation, socialist engineers would ignore or overlook published research which anticipated all the above problems. A report in 2000 revealed that blow-out preventers (BOPs) might fail at depths of a mile or more, causing catastrophic pollution. BP and Transocean can scarcely say they didn't know this, as they co-authored the report (*New Scientist*, 15 May). The problem of deepwater 'plumes', where oil and water emulsify into gigantic underwater columns which never reach the surface and therefore cannot be contained by any known surface collection methods, may have astonished local oceanographers in the Gulf but was already known from experiments off Norway in 2000 (*New Scientist*, 22 May).

It is also vanishingly unlikely that socialist society would entrust such drilling to an operational team found responsible (BP were fined \$87m plus a further \$50m to settle criminal charges) for 270 safety violations which led to 15 deaths in an explosion in 2005. And in another court judgment in Texas in December 2009 BP were fined \$100m and branded 'serial polluters'.

The cost of the cleanup plus litigation to BP is estimated at between \$1 – 2bn, but this has to be set against the year's profit BP is expected to make from its drilling operations of around \$20bn, so even in a worst case scenario it's still cheaper for BP to pay out for cleaning up and court costs than avoid the disasters in the first place. In fact, BP is cleaning up in more senses than one.

And what of the future, now that the US government is aiming to raise the corporate liability cap from \$75m to \$10bn? The likelihood is that deepwater drilling will move to fields with no such regulations. One recent find off the Falklands is a case in point, and in waters three times deeper than the site of the current spill. The mind can only boggle at what will happen if a drilling operation there suffers a similar blow-out.

Socialism, and its productive and extractive processes, will be driven primarily by consideration of human need, and the way to define and then provide that need will be one of socialist society's most pressing debates. In capitalism there are no such concerns. It follows the money, wherever it leads, even into the depths of hell, while human society and the environment inevitably get dragged down with it.

**Trend to fascism?**

Dear Editors

The letter from David Lee (April) in calling for a socialist government shows a lack of understanding – that socialism means an end to government and governed – but you are too dismissive of his seeing the inherent trend of capitalism to fascism. The “ideal” of fascism is not necessarily the pre-war examples of Germany and Italy. The philosophy of fascism is the corporate state, the well-ordered state, where the most able, that is by their own definition, assume the positions of power in politics and industry etc. The majority accept that their position is due to their being less able and grateful to accept their position as decided by “natural abilities”.

Other ways of describing this attempt of natural selection of order in society are meritocracy and equality of opportunity. So this sorts out the order of society by “natural” rule and a “benign” ruler or ruling class makes the nation as one. Classes are dismissed because the order of society is as it should be. The division between capitalists and workers is again presented as the natural order so fascism can claim it is a classless society. This obfuscation between the owing class and the majority is the common good of the whole nation, that the interests of all as are of one. A phrase which appears regularly to plaster over this is “the third way” to mean a way which is neither capitalism nor socialism, but taking the best elements of each. Blair used it early on in his career, those in the social sector – or third sector of co-ops and the like, even Ted Heath in his attempt to square the circle in his conception of corporate capitalism – the human face of capitalism. But the earliest use of “the Third Way” was the NSDAP considering this before settling on “the Third Reich” (see Michael Burleigh’s).

Bismarck’s Germany, sometimes called state capitalism by Lenin already exhibited all the signs of “benign” fascism and was probably as formative to Hitler as to Lenin/ Stalin. That Lenin thought state capitalism was the route to socialism and acknowledged the greater power of state capitalist Germany had beaten Russia was enough to show two apparently diametrically-opposed dictatorships grow as fascism.

But probably most prescient was Marx in the what could be seen as the development of what was to be called fascism, the reactionary

becoming radicalised in German or “True Socialism” which presaged the “eternal truths, the model nation”, opposing the “brutally destructive” tendency of Communism. And so on, I won’t repeat it all but summed up as the bombastic representative of the petty bourgeois Philistine. Which is as good a description of the true nature of fascism as any.

So, yes, the expressions of fascism of the pre-war variety are not visible, at least on the surface, but aside from this the tendency for fascist thought lingers in every cell of capitalism, from the infantile individuals you sometimes meet who always have a ready list of sexist, racist, anti-Semitic “jokes” to share with guilty pleasure often on their mobile phones to the more discreet smoothing over by politicians whose job, if it can be called that, is to confuse the majority that it’s in interests to do whatever are the problems of the moment. To blur over the divisions in society and represent the nation as symbolic as Unity, the problems of capitalism are all our problems, we are all in it together – the National interests (sic or sick).

The well-ordered nation state is the capitalists and politicians’ dream and aspiration, the corporate state of successful regulation of private and state undertakings, the self-defined meritocracy and the worker held in wage-slavery, happy to accept his

or her lot in the best of all possible worlds.

This is fascism in “idealised” form but capitalism’s also on a tendency towards it. But even if this should appear attractive to the petty-bourgeois Philistines it always comes along with the horrors experienced in the 20th century.

Effectively, as for as real alternatives are concerned, this turns the country into a one-party state, the consciousness of the majority is formed by the prevailing accepted norms of society, education, the press, the whole structure of production. This is as effective for control as any secret police and more acceptable as being “democratic” than totalitarianism – you get to leave a mark every few years, that’s democracy, isn’t it?

**STUART GIBSON, WIMBORNE, Dorset**

**Reply:** We still think it’s an exaggeration (and misleading) to refer to present-day Britain as “fascist” –

**Pete Seeger**

Dear Editors

As regards the article on Pete Seeger in the March dard, isn’t it about time we looked at the positive rather than the negative aspects of the folk revival in the US?

To quote from the article: “The 1960s saw Seeger affiliating with the current ‘good causes’, plucking his banjo at Civil Rights rallies (an unfortunate instrument, given Negro memories of stereotypic minstrel shows) and supporting the Anti-Vietnam War movement”.

The banjo in American music was played by both blacks and whites and goes back to a time when music was more integrated, before the minstrel shows.

Civil Rights was more than just a good cause. It was a colossal task to say the least. When people like Seeger sang at freedom rallies in the southern states they were putting themselves on the line, and to be dismissive about the role they played is sectarian. Anybody that fails to see the importance of music in the Civil Rights/Anti-Vietnam War movement is not really looking at the role it actually played.

**ROY BEAT, London SE27.**

spgb dvd



*Capitalism and others Kids' Stuff*

Takes a fresh look at the world, and challenges basic assumptions about capitalism

£5.75 (including P & P) from the Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN. Cheques to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain'.

*Poles Apart? Capitalism or Socialism as the planet heats up*

with contributions from Glenn Morris, Arctic Voice



£5.00 per copy + £1.25 P & P, from the Audio-Visual Department (rest of address and details as above).



# Christian Fascism:

## the best response

IN *AMERICAN Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (Free Press, 2006), Chris Hedges warns of the danger presented by the section of the US political spectrum usually known as the Christian right – a danger to democracy, tolerance, science and intellectual freedom. His warning concerns not Christian revivalism in general (traditional evangelists like Billy Graham, he points out, were concerned with saving souls not politics) but a specific highly political tendency called “dominionism” that aims to establish the world empire of a reborn “Christian America”.

Dominionist preachers like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, R.J. Rushdoony (pictured below) and Rod Parseley propagate their worldview through a vast array of “megachurches” and publishing houses, home schools and universities, museums and broadcasting outlets. (The programming of Paul and Jan Crouch’s Trinity Broadcasting Network is carried on over 6,000 television stations at home and abroad.) Theirs is a relentlessly simplistic worldview, supposedly based on the Bible as the literal Word of God, that denounces all opponents as servants of Satan and eagerly anticipates the miraculous horrors of the Apocalypse.

The dominionists are hostile to real science and deny global warming as well as evolution. Their “Gospel of Prosperity” celebrates unbridled capitalism and extravagant consumption. A long-term aim is government based on biblical law.

### A purely American Fascism

Hedges makes out a convincing case for regarding dominionism as a variety of totalitarianism and fascism. In certain ways, however, the dominionists differ from earlier generations of fascists in the United States, even though they too used the Christian label. Dominionist symbols are purely American; they admit to no connection with classical foreign fascisms (Italian, German etc.).

Comparing the new Christian fascists with the Ku Klux Klan, for instance, we find that each focuses on a quite different set of enemies. They renounce hatred for blacks, Catholics and Jews – the three bugbears of WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) bigotry. Instead, they appeal to Christians across racial lines, work with Catholics on issues such as abortion and prayer in schools, and cultivate a close alliance of convenience with the Zionist religious right, despite the divergent apocalyptic expectations of the two groups. The main targets of their hostility are those they call “secular humanists” – a catch-all for all who oppose them, non-fundamentalist Christians as well as atheists and agnostics – and also Islam.

### A highly lucrative business

How do the dominionist preachers finance their activities? Partly by fleecing their

flocks, who pay a “tithe” of 10 percent of income in addition to other donations. Other money comes from sympathetic capitalists, including Amway founder Richard DeVos and beer baron Joseph Coors. Finally, the Bush Administration, with which they had close ties through the Council for National Policy, enabled them to tap federal funds for “faith-based” social service initiatives – an arrangement that Obama has left intact.

We may reasonably doubt whether the big capitalists and politicians who support the dominionists care all that deeply about religious dogma. Their main interest presumably lies in the prospect of intensified control over and exploitation of the working class.

Indeed, for the preachers themselves religion is, apart from anything else, a highly lucrative business. Their opulent lifestyles suggest that they divert a significant portion of the various cash flows into their own bank accounts. Evidently they have overlooked certain biblical passages – for instance, Jesus’ well-known remark about the camel who tried to pass through the eye of a needle.

### Our attitude as socialists

The danger presented by “Christian fascism” is a real one. It threatens us as socialists at least as much as it threatens all other “servants of Satan”. Our ability to spread our ideas depends on tolerance of minority opinions. Moreover, people whose minds have been addled by belief in magic, miracles and divine texts are unlikely to be receptive to socialist ideas.

So we cannot say: “It doesn’t matter which group of capitalists have the upper hand; they are all equally bad because they all represent capitalism.” Of course it matters.

Faced with the threat of fascism, socialists share a certain amount of common ground with non-socialists concerned to defend democracy and science. Both, for example, seek to debunk “creationism” and explain current scientific thinking about evolution.

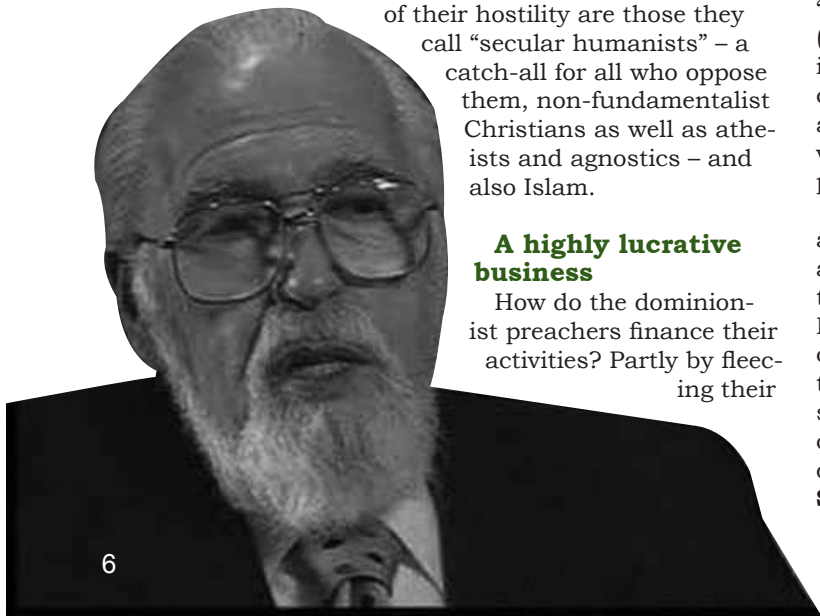
However, we must not jeopardise our identity as socialists by joining broad “anti-fascist” blocs that inevitably accept the continued existence of capitalism. One reason is that as socialists we have a unique contribution to make to effective action against fascism.

### Real versus illusory community

In his book Hedges describes how vulnerable people are recruited into dominionist churches. The target of “seduction” is someone whose history and circumstances (family breakdown, abuse, addiction, isolation, etc.) make it especially hard to bear the absence of community in capitalism. The church offers an illusion of community and the victim snatches at the bait, only later to discover, when escape has become very difficult, that he or she has paid a high price in submission for yet another illusion.

The soil in which fascism grows is the impersonal and alienating conditions of life under capitalism, especially at times of crisis. Hedges appears to understand this. But there is a disconnect between analysis and conclusion. He calls for more determined resistance to Christian fascism, but offers no hope of a more communal way of life that might counter the emotional appeal of fascism. Only socialists, by holding out the prospect of real community, can act effectively to undermine the illusory community of fascism.

STEFAN



# PUBLICATIONS ORDER FORM

## PAMPHLETS

### An Inconvenient Question: Socialism and the Environment

One of the major problems of capitalism is pollution – as capitalists cause long term damage to the environment for short term gain. This pamphlet outlines the Socialist case for a better, cleaner world run for people, not for profit.

£2.00 x \_\_\_\_\_

Price and Qty

### From Capitalism to Socialism...how we live and how we could live

Contrasts the present state of life with what a future Socialist world would bring, and then suggests what kind of political action can be taken to bring Socialism about.

£1.00 x \_\_\_\_\_

### Africa: A Marxian Analysis

A 30-page pamphlet written by socialists living in Africa consisting mainly of reprints from the *Socialist Standard*. Marx's materialist conception of history and analysis of society is applied to subjects such as tribalism, religion, race and class, colonialism and capitalism, Sharia Law in Nigeria.

£1.50 x \_\_\_\_\_

### Socialism as a Practical Alternative

Sets forth the practical proposition that Socialism entails, and develops further arguments into ways in which a sane society based on social equality and cooperation could operate.

£1.00 x \_\_\_\_\_

### Some aspects of Marxian Economics

A series of articles drawn from the *Socialist Standard* explaining the real nature of modern economic problems and the failure of 'conventional economics' to solve them.

£2.00 x \_\_\_\_\_

### How the Gods were Made

A classic reprint of a text defending the materialist conception of history. In doing so it explains the Socialist opposition to religion.

£1.50 x \_\_\_\_\_

### Marxism and Darwinism by Anton Pannekoek

A classic reprint of a text that puts in context our origins as an animal species and also our social nature as a key part in the development of society.

£1.50 x \_\_\_\_\_

### How we Live and How we Might Live by William Morris

A clear exposition of what Morris saw as being wrong with society in his time and how a moneyless, tradeless society based on common ownership and democratic control would have to be the basis of any healthy arrangement of affairs.

£1.50 x \_\_\_\_\_

### The Right to be Lazy and other articles by Paul Lafargue

A reprint of Marx's son-in-law's classic text. Makes the clear point that any imaginary right to work under capitalism is just a wage slave's 'right' to be exploited. Includes a collection of other important articles written by Lafargue not easily available in print and an introduction by the Socialist Party.

£2.00 x \_\_\_\_\_

### Marxism Revisited

A lively document of a series of five talks given by the members of the Socialist Party as a part of a weekend seminar in 1998. Titles are as follows: 1) Who the hell was Karl Marx? 2) Was Marx a Leninist? 3) The fetishism of commodities 4) Has the modern market superseded Marxist economics? 5) Is the Socialist Party Marxist?

£2.00 x \_\_\_\_\_

### Socialist Principles Explained

This pamphlet is a basic introduction to our case, and ideal for people who have just come across Socialist ideas or who are thinking of joining. It explains in simple language our object and each of the eight principles.

£2.00 x \_\_\_\_\_

### The Market System must Go! Why Reformism doesn't work

Explains why the Socialist Party advocates the revolutionary transformation of existing society rather than piecemeal reform, like the Labour Party or Conservatives. It is a detailed backup to our more introductory pamphlets putting the case for genuine revolutionary change.

£2.75 x \_\_\_\_\_

### All the above pamphlets (25% discount)

£15.00 x \_\_\_\_\_

## BOOKS

### A Socialist Life by Heather Ball

A collection of sort stories by *Socialist Standard* writer Heather Ball. Many readers liked her distinctive writing style, finding it full of charm, warmth, humanity and humour. Sadly, Heather died before she could complete her writing project. This collection, published by the Socialist Party, presents the case for Socialism on the basis of individual, everyday experience.

£3.75 x \_\_\_\_\_

### Are We Prisoners of our Genes?

The argument that our behaviour is determined by our physical inheritance may pose as science, but in reality it is a socially determined prejudice used as part of a crude political ideology. Faced with such objections to socialism, the first thing that needs to be done is to clarify what is going to be meant by the term 'human nature'.

£4.75 x \_\_\_\_\_

### Socialism or your Money Back

Articles from the *Socialist Standard* covering many key events of the last hundred years as they happened. This book will be of interest to those wanting to study the political, economic and social history of the twentieth century, as well as to those committed to the interests of the majority class of wage and salary workers who want a different society to replace the profit-wages-money system that is capitalism.

SPECIAL PRICE: £1.00 x \_\_\_\_\_

## DVD

Capitalism and Other Kids' Stuff

£5.75 x \_\_\_\_\_

Poles Apart? Capitalism or Socialism as the Planet Heats Up

£5.75 x \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL .....£ \_\_\_\_\_

All prices include postage and packing. For six or more of any publication, reduce the price by one third.

Return this form along with your cheque or money order to:

**The Socialist Party of Great Britain,  
FREEPOST,  
London, SW4 7BR,  
United Kingdom.**

(No postage necessary if mailed within the UK)

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

County.....

Postcode.....PHONE (optional).....

E-MAIL (optional).....

# Pieces together

## RIGHTWING NONSENSE

"The demonstration was marked by the same rhetoric that has galvanised the Tea Party movement and which crowds hear from Sarah Palin on an almost daily basis: disgust with Mr Obama's agenda, rage at his health reform legislation, Government bailouts, accusations of a socialist White House and an unconstitutional takeover of American life by Washington. 'We are in a war,' said Larry Pratt, president of Gunowners of America. 'The other side knows they are at war because they started it. They're coming for our freedom, for our money, for our kids, for our property. They're coming for everything because they are socialists'" (Times, 20 April).

## "LAZY" WORKERS (1)

"The image Microsoft doesn't want you to see: Too tired to stay awake, the Chinese workers earning just 34p an hour. Showing Chinese sweatshop workers slumped over their desks with exhaustion, it is an image that Microsoft won't want the world to see. Employed for gruelling 15-hour shifts, in appalling conditions and 86F heat, many fall asleep on their stations during their meagre ten-minute breaks. For as little as 34p an hour, the men and women work six or seven days a week, making computer mice and web cams for the American multinational computer company" (Daily Mail, 18 April).

## RELIGIOUS NONSENSE

"Women who wear immodest clothing and are promiscuous are to blame for earthquakes, an Iranian cleric said. The explanation for tremors in one of the most earthquake-prone countries came after President Ahmadinejad predicted a quake and suggested that many of Tehran's 12 million residents should move. Hojatoleslam Kasem Sedighi was quoted by Iranian media as saying that adultery increased quakes and the only solution was to take refuge in religion" (Times, 20 April).

## "LAZY" WORKERS (2)

"A study of 6,000 British civil servants found that those who regularly worked 10 or 11-hour days were up to 60 per cent more likely to suffer heart disease or die younger than those who worked shorter hours. The research, published online in the European Heart Journal, found that people who worked three or more hours longer than a seven-hour day put their health at risk, possibly as a result of being more stressed and having less time to unwind" (Times, 12 May).

## Contact Details

### UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

#### LONDON

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

**Enfield and Haringey branch.** Thurs May 18 and 27, 8pm. Angel Community Centre, Raynham Rd, N18. Corres: 17 Dorset Road, N22 7SL.

Email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

**South London branch.** 1st Tues. 7.00pm. Head Office. 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Tel: 020 7622 3811

**West London branch.** 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (Corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY

#### MIDLANDS

**West Midlands Regional branch.** Meets every two months on a Sunday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Tel: Tony Gluck 01242 235615. Email: tonygluck111@btinternet.com

#### NORTHEAST

**Northeast branch.** Contact: Brian Barry, 86 Edgmond Ct, Ryhope, Sunderland SR2 0DY. Tel: 0191 521 0690. Email 3491@bbarry.f2s.com

#### NORTHWEST

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

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

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

**Cumbria.** Brendan Cummings, 19

Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG

**Carlisle:** Robert Whitfield.

Email: rewcb13@yahoo.co.uk

Tel: 07906 373975

**Rochdale.** Tel: R. Chadwick.

01706 522365

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

#### YORKSHIRE

**Skipton.** R Cooper, 1 Caxton Garth, Threshfield, Skipton BD23 5EZ.

Tel: 01756 752621

**Todmorden:** Keith Scholey, 1 Leeviey

Ct, Windsor Rd, OL14 5LJ.

Tel: 01706 814 149

#### SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

**South West Regional branch.** Meets every two months on a Saturday afternoon (see meetings page for details). Shane Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. Tel: 0117 9511199

**Canterbury.** Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope

Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB

**Luton.** Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive,

LU2 7LP

**Redruth.** Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence

Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB.

Tel: 01209 219293

#### EAST ANGLIA

**East Anglian Regional branch.**

Meets every two months on a Saturday

afternoon (see meetings page for details).

Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay,

CM12 0EX. n.deutz@btinternet.com

David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive,

Eccles-on-Sea, NR12 0SF.

Tel: 01692 582533.

Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd,

Hethersett, NR9 3JD.

Tel: 01603 814343.

**Cambridge.** Andrew Westley, 10

Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge

CB2 4RS. Tel: 07890343044

#### IRELAND

**Cork:** Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods,

Frankfield, Cork. Tel: 021 4896427.

Email: mariekev@eircom.net

**Newtownabbey:** Nigel McCullough.

Tel: 028 90852062.

#### SCOTLAND

**Edinburgh branch.** 1st Thur. 8-9pm.

The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above

Victoria Street), Edinburgh.

J. Moir. Tel: 0131 440 0995. JIMMY@

jmoir29.freereserve.co.uk Branch website:

http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/

**Glasgow branch.** 3rd Wednesday of

each month at 8pm in Community

Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road,

Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112

Napiershall Street, Glasgow G20 6HT.

Tel: 0141 5794109. Email: richard.

donnely1@ntlworld.com

**Ayrshire:** D. Trainer, 21 Manse Street,

Salcoats, KA21 5AA. Tel: 01294

469994. Email: derricktrainer@freuk.

com

**Dundee.** Ian Ratcliffe, 16 Birkhall Ave,

Wormit, Newport-on-Tay, DD6 8PX.

Tel: 01328 541643

**West Lothian.** 2nd and 4th Weds in

month, 7.30-9.30. Lanthorn Community

Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge,

Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53

Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston, West

Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: 01506 462359

Email: matt@wsmweb.fsnet.co.uk

#### WALES

**Swansea branch.** 2nd Mon, 7.30pm,

Unitarian Church, High Street. Corres:

Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well

Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB.

Tel: 01792 643624

**Cardiff and District.** John James, 67

Romilly Park Road, Barry CF62 6RR.

Tel: 01446 405636

### INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

#### AFRICA

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

Nairobi.

**Swaziland.** Mandla Ntshakala, PO Box

981, Manzini.

**Zambia.** Kephah Mulenga, PO Box

280168, Kitwe.

#### ASIA

**India.** World Socialist Group, Vill

Gobardhanpur. PO Amral, Dist.

Bankura, 722122

**Japan.** Michael. Email:

worldsocialismjapan@hotmail.com.

#### EUROPE

**Denmark.** Graham Taylor, Kjaerslund 9,

floor 2 (middle), DK-8260 Viby J

**Germany.** Norbert. E-mail:

weltsozialismus@gmx.net

**Norway.** Robert Stafford.

Email: hallblithe@yahoo.com

**Italy.** Gian Maria Freddi, Casella Postale

n. 28., c/o Ag. PT VR 17, 37131 Verona

### COMPANION PARTIES

#### OVERSEAS

**World Socialist Party of Australia.**

P. O. Box 1266 North Richmond

3121, Victoria, Australia.. Email:

commonownership@yahoo.com.au

**Socialist Party of Canada/Parti**

**Socialiste du Canada.** Box 4280,

Victoria B.C. V8X 3X8 Canada.

Email: SPC@iname.com

**World Socialist Party (New Zealand)**

P.O. Box 1929, Auckland, NI, New

Zealand.

**World Socialist Party of the United**

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

02144 USA.

Email: wspboston@covad.net





# cooking the books

## How capitalism moves

Last month's general election was dominated by "the economy" but the politicians never learn. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, they were still claiming to be able to control the way the capitalist economy works.

You might have thought that the Labour Party would have become more cautious about such claims following the exploding of Gordon Brown's claim to have put an end to boom and bust. But no. "The economy is coming out of recession thanks to Labour's measures", claimed a leaflet put out for the Labour candidate in Streatham.

The economy does seem to be beginning to come out of the biggest slump since the end of the last world war, but this was bound to occur sooner or later as the movement of the capitalist economy is cyclical. A period of recession and stagnation is followed by a period of expansion just as a period of expansion is followed by a period of recession, each period creating the conditions for the other. This in accordance "the economic law of motion of modern society" which Marx said in his Preface to *Capital* he had set out to lay bare.

The Labour government happened to be in office when the recovery stage of the cycle showed some modest signs of beginning. But if they want to claim credit for

this by virtue of simply been in office at the time, then they should also accept responsibility for the recession that preceded it when they were also in office. In fact they and their policies were responsible for neither. Uncontrollable capitalism was.

The other parties, naturally, claimed that the Labour government had been responsible for the recession – and that their policies would bring it to an end.

"We'll cut Gordon Brown's waste and debt to get our economy moving", promised the election address of the Tory candidate in Vauxhall, "Labour are now the party of unemployment. Conservatives will get Britain working again by boosting enterprise".

The LibDems were no different. "Labour promised us economic stability, but they have failed", said a leaflet put out on behalf of their candidate for Richmond Park. "Only the Lib Dems and Shadow Chancellor Vince Cable have a plan that will get our economy moving forward again."

But no government has the power to get the economy "moving". All governments do is preside over the workings of the capitalist economy as it moves forward and backwards of its own accord, irrespective of what they may or may not do.

So why do politicians claim to have a power they do not have and make promises on this basis? There are only two possible answers. They either take us for fools or they are fools themselves.

## Tiny Tips

Sex workers in Bangladesh, some as young as 12, are putting their health at risk by taking a drug to make themselves fatter so they are more attractive to clients. Their madams feed them steroids also used to make cows gain weight:

<http://tinyurl.com/36xcf4w>

The Mahatma Gandhi Limited Edition 3000 and Mahatma Gandhi Limited Edition 241 [pens]are available for for 93,500 dirhams (£7,292.89) and 13,800 dirhams (£1,076.38) respectively:

<http://tinyurl.com/3646dmz>

Imagine living in a Tesco house, sending your child to a Tesco school, swimming in a Tesco pool and, of course, shopping at the local Tesco superstore. According to the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (Cabe), the government's adviser on architecture and design, this collective monopoly is not an imaginary dystopia. "Tesco Towns" on this model are already being planned across the UK, from Inverness in Scotland to Seaton in Devon:

<http://tinyurl.com/2a2s5zf>

It's the ultimate hole-in-the-wall -- a money machine that dispenses pure

gold. But installed beneath the gold-coated ceilings of Abu Dhabi's Emirates

Palace hotel, where royalty and billionaires come for cappuccinos topped with gold flakes, the machine almost seems part of the furniture:

<http://tinyurl.com/32svnwp>

The Brazilian women's movement's applause for the inclusion of sexual and reproductive rights in the draft version of the government's 3rd National Programme on Human Rights (PNDH 3) has been cut short by the decision to eliminate this controversial issue from the text. The government's decision to modify the draft programme came after a campaign headed up by the Catholic Church, which went so far as to refer to leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as "Herod" -- an allusion to the king of Judea who ordered the killing of baby boys in and around Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus Christ, according to the Bible

<http://tinyurl.com/39a3anm>

"I'm not being rightwing," she [Ayaan Hirsi Ali] says. "The people who believe themselves to be on the left, and who defend the agents of Islam in the name of tolerance and culture, are being rightwing. Not just rightwing. Extreme rightwing. I don't understand how you can be so upset about the Christian

right and just ignore the Islamic right. I'm talking about equality."

<http://tinyurl.com/34a8d9y>

A regiment of eunuchs should be established to guard India's borders and leading politicians, a state minister suggested on Tuesday, citing their "loyalty and integrity":

<http://tinyurl.com/3ymixt4>

An Australian woman Monday pleaded guilty to using her 12-year-old daughter as a sex worker. The 41-year-old woman, who was herself sexually abused when she was a child, has admitted to being the commercial operator of a sexual services business.. The court was told that in August last year the woman complained of not having money so she and another man, Gary John Devine, decided to use her daughter as a prostitute

<http://tinyurl.com/324t3u9>

Half of America has only 2.5% of the wealth  
Half of America has only 0.5% of the stocks and bonds  
Real average earnings have not increased in 50 years  
Taxes get better and better for the rich  
If you aren't in the top 1%, then you're getting a bum deal

<http://tinyurl.com/3xn88zk>



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

020 7219 8414

*Extract of MI5 recording, number XA-4821-S, Westminster, May 7. Principals in cross-Party coalition talks, House Speaker residing.*

**Chair:** I must begin by asking you, gentlemen, if any here present are intending in disregard of honour or scruple to prostitute all their principles simply for the sake of power at any price?

**All:** Of course!

**Chair:** Oh. Ahem. Well, that's alright then. Now, to business.

**Clegg:** Still think I'm a joke, Cameron?

**Brown:** I think you're both bloody jokes.

**Clegg:** I'm not even speaking to you, Brown.

**Brown:** Alright, I resign.

**Chair:** To order. The agenda is how to rake back £163bn without ending up with Greek fire in Whitehall.

**Clegg:** PR! AV plus! STD! No wait, I mean...

**Cameron:** I'm a liberal Tory, that means I'll screw the poor and cut child tax credits but I won't give the rich that huge inheritance tax bonus until next year.

**Clegg:** I want no tax for the 10k superpoor. And did I mention PR?

**Chair:** Do Labour wish to say anything?

**Blunkett:** Ok, we give in.

**Cameron:** What?

**Reid:** Who wants to be a coalition of losers?

**Clegg:** But you said you wanted PR!

**Reid:** Balls.

**Chair:** Come again?

**Ed Balls:** We've got what we want, Brown's head on a pole, plus we won't get blamed for the cuts we would have had to make in office. We'll clean up next election. Cameron will be toast and Clegg will be cornflakes.

**Chair:** You mean you're walking out on the negotiations?

**Harman:** Manning the lifeboats actually. Good luck with the deckchairs. The Titanic's all yours.

**Clegg:** I knew they weren't serious. Cameron, we've got to do something. The axeman cometh.

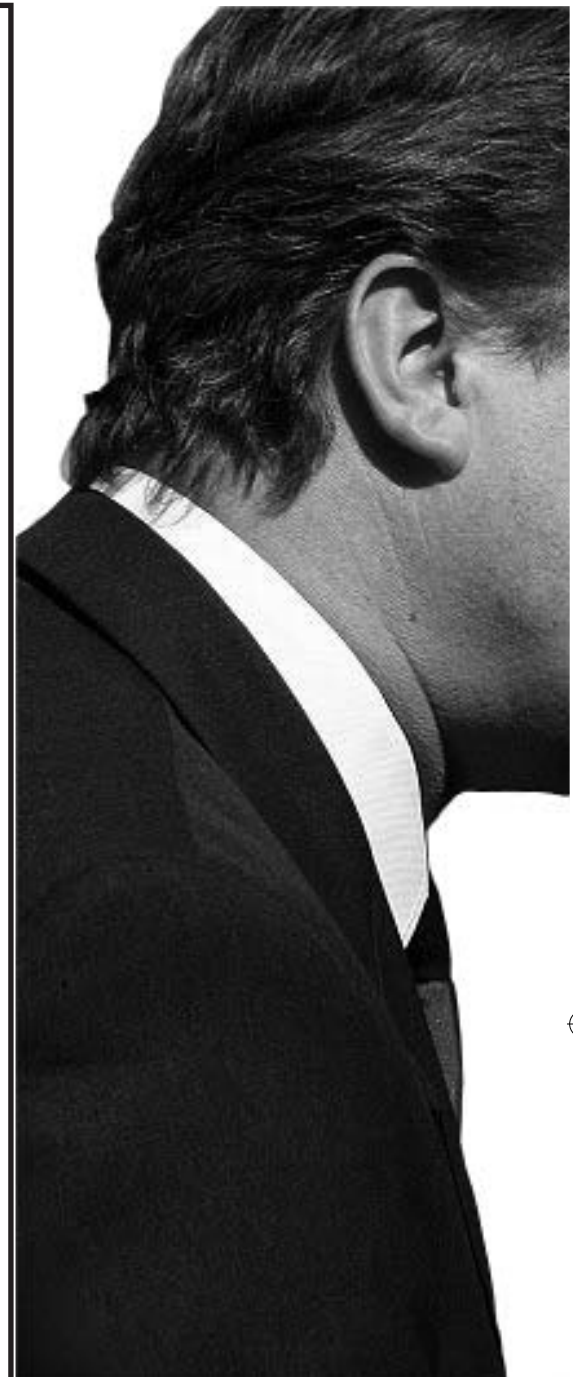
**Cameron:** You mean the IMF?

**Clegg:** No, I mean our rank and file. If I don't screw a deal out of this hung parliament I'm hung, and if you don't, your name will be down there with Ian Duncan Smith.

**Cameron:** Oh my god. But we're diametrically opposed!

**Clegg:** No, that was yesterday. Today we're liberals. Any deal will do. Now about PR...

*Recording indistinct. Sounds of Miliband brothers scuffling and Alex Salmond singing 'Whose bonny wee lassie am I?')*



# Political whores trading

**W**e strongly suspect that the attached transcript is a hoax, which is why we didn't pay good money for it. However, something like it probably did happen. Not for a generation has there been such an edge-of-the-seat performance from all three main parties



Am I going to have trouble with your trendy liberal sentiments?

Heil Hitler

rage over fat cat corruption has got to be any politician's worst nightmare, and as if that wasn't enough, the spectre haunting Europe this season is one of Greeks burning down banks. Hanging over this new government, even before it's got started, is a ghastly sense of foreboding.

**“An election which produced no clear winner did however produce three clear losers. All three leaders immediately faced the guillotine.”**

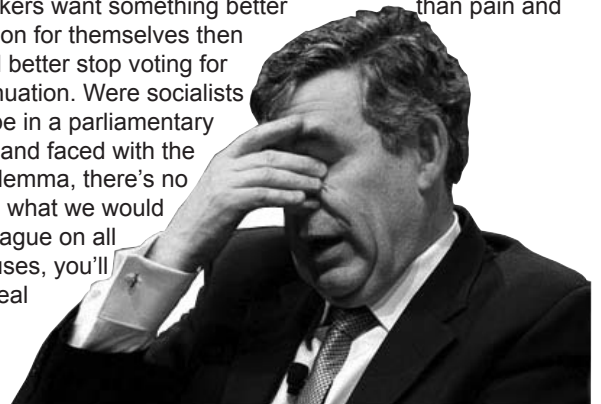
In the event, desperation has forced Cameron to marry Clegg, on the grounds of better a bad hand than no hand at all. Clegg in particular was in a hard bind. He would have been crucified for not making a deal, their first chance in 30 years, and given the Lib Dem 'democracy' mantra, no less crucified for hypocritically siding with Labour when they were in a clear elective minority with no mandate to govern. As it is, he will probably be crucified by his own party for this deal with the Tories. As one Liberal put it: "I think we could be wiped out for a generation by this decision. We will probably be annihilated at the next election" (*Guardian*, 12 May).

A common assumption doing the rounds is that, regardless of Cameron's plan to shore up the Con-Dem'd government with 5 year fixed-term legislation and an increase in the majority requirement for a Parliamentary vote of no confidence, the whole show will probably collapse in disarray in a couple of years or so. Labour certainly are banking on a short period to regroup in opposition and another '97-like landslide. But coalitions only look shaky because they don't happen often in Britain. In other EU countries where proportional representation is the norm, coalitions happen almost routinely and government still manages to function, insofar as governments can ever really be said to function.

The socialist view of all this has been echoed by, of all people, Michael Portillo (see Editorial). Governments don't control the money, the money controls governments, and when money says 'Jump', it is always the working class who are for

the high jump. It is with some sadness that we predict that the poor will pay the bill, however the politicians work out their debt repayment schemes, while the rich will do alright, thanks very much. What's not going to happen is that capitalism somehow falls flat on its face and dies of a seizure. Experience shows that capitalism is good at surviving, even though it may consume many of its supporters in the process. All governments are really coalitions of capitalist class interests against the working class, so if workers want something better than pain and oppression for themselves then they had better stop voting for its continuation. Were socialists ever to be in a parliamentary minority and faced with the Clegg dilemma, there's no question what we would say: A plague on all your houses, you'll get no deal from us.

PJS



on a high-turnout vote, with voters queuing up for hours to get in on the act and then being turned away by the jobsworths running the polling stations. All that drama for a holy grail they all knew was a poisoned chalice. The Governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, had predicted that whoever formed the next government and made the required cuts in expenditure would be out of power for a generation afterwards. Perhaps this was why Labour apparatchiks like Blunkett and Reid were throwing in the towel even before the votes were all in, and all that warm Liberal-friendly pillow-talk during the election rapidly cooled as the realisation dawned that sometimes it's better to be outside the tent pissing in.

An election which produced no clear winner did however produce three clear losers. All three leaders immediately faced the guillotine, Clegg for being the golden boy who lost seats, Cameron for his secretive, Blair-like reliance on an inner circle and disregard of anyone else, as well as his crap and meaningless 'Big Society' election message, and Brown just for being Brown when New Labour was supposed to be about Blair, flair and razzle dazzle. A shaky coalition forced to wield the machete on wages and public spending amid general public

We look at David's Harvey's latest book *The Enigma of Capital*.



# The crisis: what is to be done?

**W**e are living through the biggest capitalist crisis since the 1930s – a crisis with economic and ecological, not to mention social and political, dimensions. No one knows for sure what's going to happen or what to do next. In this context, what we need as a matter of urgency is understanding. We need to know what the crisis is, why it has arisen, and what, if anything, can be done about it. David Harvey, an acclaimed geographer and professor of anthropology, points to some of the answers to these urgent questions.

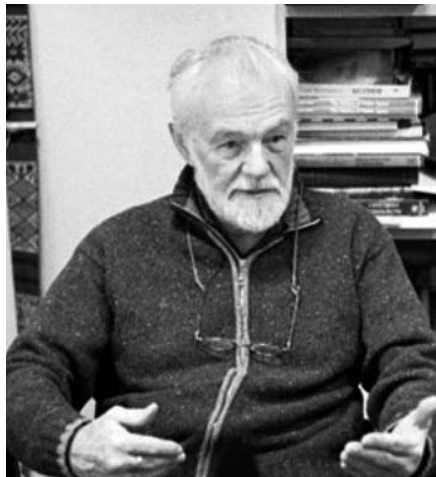
(Profile Books, 2010, £14.99) opens with an account of the recent history of the economic crisis, from the first signs of trouble in the US 'subprime' mortgage market in 2006, right up to very nearly the present day. This account is in the style of and largely taken from the liberal and financial mainstream press. Harvey then moves on to analyse what is really going on behind this standard account. This is helpful because no economist or financial journalist has been of any use in predicting the crisis or explaining why it has happened. Harvey rejects the search for a scapegoat – Alan Greenspan, Gordon Brown, irresponsible borrowers, greedy bankers, and so on – and instead argues that crises are an inevitable and necessary feature of the normal working of capitalism.

His basic argument is a Marxian one. Modern societies are driven by the capitalists' search for ever-more profit. Competition forces capitalists to reinvest at least a portion of that profit, again in the expectation of yet more profit. This leads to 'capital accumulation' on an ever-expanding scale, and this circulation process, much like the blood in the body, must keep flowing if profitable investment – and therefore the socially

necessary production of goods and services – isn't to have a scary heart attack. But as the years pass, certain scares are inevitable – and the problems get worse as the amount of capital searching for profitable reinvestment gets larger and larger.

### Harvey's analysis

Harvey identifies seven main risk factors: money capital scarcities (where's all the money going to come from?), labour problems (e.g., insufficient supplies of cheap, 'flexible' labour), disproportionalities between sectors (one sector overexpands in



Acclaimed geographer and professor of anthropology David Harvey

its search for profits), natural limits (e.g., scarcities of natural resources), unbalanced technological and organisational changes (including competition and monopoly and so on), indiscipline in the labour process (workers slacking off or organising unions for example) and lack of effective demand (consumers' ability to pay for goods and services). He argues that any one of these can be a clot in the free flow of capital. But

capitalism cannot tolerate such clots for long without dying.

Like the human body, capitalism is a dynamic system that is very good at sorting out its own problems. It patches itself up, and gets going again – but always at the price of storing up future problems for itself. So, to take recent examples, a crisis of profitability in the 1970s led such figures as Thatcher and Reagan to dampen down wages by crushing unions, creating unemployment and importing cheaper immigrant labour from abroad. This was successful for a while, but created a new problem: a population of unemployed or badly paid workers does not make for the vibrant and ever-expanding consumer markets capital needs to prosper (there can be no growth without sales). This problem was solved by recklessly extending credit to ever more people, regardless of their ability to repay. This in turn led to a crisis of overindebtedness in the working class, which led to a crisis of confidence in debt instruments, starting with subprime mortgages in the US, which led us to where we are now – the supply of credit drying up, leading to blockages in the flow of capital, in turn leading to rising unemployment, the loss and devaluation of capital, and so on. The economic 'stimulus' measures (the defibrillator) haven't worked, so now we are being promised Thatcher-style austerity (a fat-free diet) for the working class.

A crisis can be understood as those times when socially produced wealth returns to its 'rightful owners', the capitalist class, and as an opportunity for that class to consolidate its power over both the working class and the political machinery of the state (it was a commonplace in some sections of the financial press that,

**“There is no way an anti-capitalist social order can be constructed without seizing state power, radically transforming it and reworking the constitutional and institutional framework that currently supports private property...”(Harvey)**

whoever won the general election, the government would be forced to do the bidding of ‘international investors’, i.e., the capitalist class). The capitalist class then uses that power to claw back as many as possible of the gains and reforms won by previous rounds of class struggle and political action. ‘Balance’ and health is restored to the operation of profitability, and the flow of capital can continue. Hence the necessity as well as inevitability of crisis under capitalism.

**Leninist fly in the soup**

So, what is to be done about all this? Harvey is right to insist that nothing less than what are usually dismissed as ‘utopian’ answers will do. The crisis is rooted in the system. Capitalist attempts to solve the crisis will mean more austerity and misery for everyone apart from the smallest minority. A systemic problem cries out for systemic solutions. In this, we agree with Harvey. True, the influence of Leninism in the book, especially in the final chapter, is something of a fly in the soup. Eating around the fly becomes increasingly distasteful as we get near the end of the meal – Harvey’s criticism of what he calls ‘actually existing communism’, i.e., the state-capitalist dictatorships in the former Soviet Union and so on, is mild to say the least, though at least he is good enough to confirm that what most people call ‘socialism’ is actually just “democratically managed or regulated capitalism”.

Genuine socialists with weak stomachs may baulk at this. But if so, they will miss out on some good, solid, political nutrition. Particularly interesting are three points of strong agreement between Harvey and us.

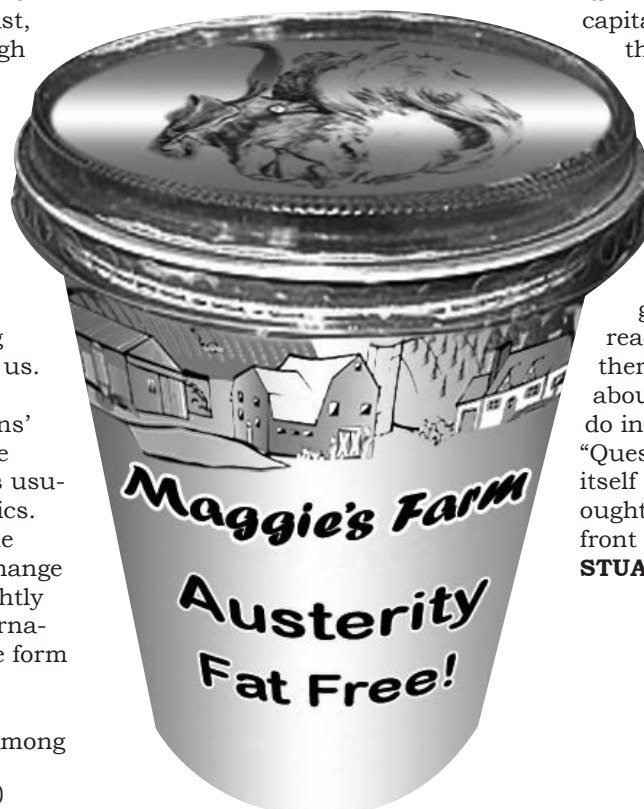
The first is the importance of what he calls ‘mental conceptions’ in revolutionary change, i.e., the importance of ideas and what is usually dismissed as ‘utopian’ politics. Without a change in what people think about the prospects for change and for socialism, as Harvey rightly points out, there can be no alternative other than a return to some form of capitalism.

The second is his insistence, somewhat against the fashion among

other anti-capitalist theorists, on the importance of capturing and transforming the state. There is, he says, “no way that an anti-capitalist social order can be constructed without seizing state power, radically transforming it and reworking the constitutional and institutional framework that currently supports private property, the market system and endless capital accumulation. To ignore the state and the dynamics of the interstate system is therefore a ridiculous idea for any anti-capitalist movement to accept”. We wholeheartedly agree.

The third is his insistence that the crisis does not mean that capitalism is ending. Capitalism is a dynamic system that has always solved its own problems in the past, and will do so again, whatever the cost to the rest of us – and the cost this time could well be environmental disaster, perhaps even catastrophic war. Capitalism will never fall on its own, says Harvey. It will have to be stopped and the power of the capitalist class ended by concerted political action. And although the prospects for such change do not seem that good at the moment, a crisis will at least tend to

*“Now we are being promised Thatcher-style austerity (a fat-free diet) for the working class.”*



make the question of alternative social systems seem more relevant and urgent. In other words, good capitalists always view crises as opportunities. It would be wise if the people they rule over did the same.

There is plenty of room, then, for both agreement and disagreement in Harvey’s book. As a book, it is a bit of a loose, baggy monster – it is over-long and repetitive, loosely and sometimes vaguely written (things happen “big time”, without quantification or referencing), and seemingly hurriedly and lazily assembled from the professor’s lecture notes. His writing mostly seems aimed at a general audience, and yet technical terms and Marxian jargon go unexplained, and ideologically loaded and potentially confusing words and phrases are used without apology or caution. But most of these faults can and should be overlooked because the substance of his argument is sound and deserves as wide an audience as possible. In addition, his analysis of the importance of urbanisation and the ownership and control of land and resources in modern capitalism is an important modern updating of Marxian theory, expanding on some insightful and prescient comments by Marx in .

Harvey also has an extremely useful model for thinking about how capitalism moves and changes, through the interconnected development of seven ‘spheres’ of activity, again derived from Marx, but avoiding the determinism and one-sidedness of many of Marx’s later followers. Harvey helps us understand, in relatively straightforward English, what’s really going on behind the stories we read in the mainstream press, and therefore helps us think clearly about what it might be possible to do in the future. As Harvey says, “Questioning the future of capitalism itself as an adequate social system ought, therefore, to be in the forefront of current debate.”

**STUART WATKINS**

# The race to the bottom



## *Could Western corporations do without sweatshop production?*

**S**weatshops are workplaces where the working conditions are extremely poor and health and safety laws are not enforced or are non-existent. News reports of fires which have killed dozens of people because fire doors were locked in sweatshop factories are not uncommon. Wages are very low, there may be bullying and intimidation, especially of anyone trying to improve conditions. Hours are long and the work itself may be very demanding and even dangerous. Sick workers cannot take time off and are penalised if they leave the factory. Sub-contractors for European, Japanese and American corporations refuse their staff breaks, monitoring the times they go to the toilet and harassing and humiliating staff. Profit comes before safety, before any quality of life the workers may have, before any idea of comfort.

Developing countries are producing an increasing amount of the world's manufacturing production. This is symptomatic of the new international division of labour, whereby Western

countries close their factories at home, where wages rates are higher, and invest in factories in the 'Third World' as the labour costs are so much lower. Unfortunately for the 'Third world' workers, it was not undiluted joy at the prospect of having jobs and a bit of money. The labour costs might be cheaper because the cost of living is cheaper, but the wage rates can be so low that workers find it hard to survive in Thailand and Cambodia for instance.

Western corporations used to be able to distance themselves to a certain extent from the conditions in their sub-contractors assembly plants, because of the geographical distance between, say, Britain and China. People in Britain did not necessarily realise that when they bought an item of clothing from Umbro, a British company, it was actually made in China in sweatshop conditions, conditions that would just not be acceptable in modern day Britain.

Campaigns by Human Rights agencies, such as Oxfam and the Clean Clothes Campaign, have publicised the

conditions suffered by workers in the sweatshops. Although companies may try to say that they are not responsible for the conditions of work in the firms they sub-contract out to, campaigners have appealed to the sense of fair play and compassion in consumers. Although not all consumers are worried by the idea of sweatshop conditions for the people who make their clothes, the corporations do not want a bad image in the media and have produced corporate 'codes of conduct' and company policies which try to improve their standing in the public eye as well as (maybe) alleviate some of the worst problems.

How far they have managed to clean up their image or help people in sweatshops in the developing world is debatable. According to Oxfam, the 'race to the bottom' was inevitable as you cannot have very cheap clothes and also give your workers a decent standard of living. Although British workers also suffered from sweatshops in the past, a mixture of increased unionisation, philanthropy and labour laws helped to improve conditions for the working class.

The question of how far can Western corporations distance themselves from sweatshop production can only really be understood by looking at the bigger picture, which is: why is the pursuit of profit, to the detriment of all the finer things in life for the working class, so all pervasive?

The main goal in capitalism is the pursuit of profit. Profit is put before needs. This is why millions of people do not have enough to eat – they simply don't have the money to buy food. The world is quite capable of growing enough food for everyone and more, but no money means no food for poor people. Poor people are stuck if they cannot improve their wages and conditions due to merciless capitalists, unless they either migrate legally or illegally to another better paid job in another country.

According to philosopher Iris Marion Young, we cannot blame consumers directly for the misfortune of the sweatshop workers, but we can accept political responsibility and change the process. She said that, although many individuals are involved, from the manufacturers to the consumers, they should all play their part in improving the lot of the 'Third World' workers. This is unrealistic in a capitalist world. Capitalist corporations are there to make money and all we can do is alleviate the symptoms – unless we cure it completely by changing the economic system in which we live. There will always be someone who wants to make even more profit, by forcing poor conditions on the workers, or moving the factory elsewhere to where the labour laws are laxer, as happened from Mexico to China, when some *macquiladoras* (or assembly plants) in Mexico were closed so the capitalist corporations could find cheaper labour elsewhere. And consumers may not even know where else to buy their clothes.

So, although Oxfam and the Clean Clothes campaign have brought the attention of the media to the practices of manufacturers, still people cannot see it for themselves 'next door' so are immune to the suffering. The suffering is too far away. They would help their next door neighbour but that is in close proximity. People at a distance are 'out of sight, out of mind'. When even photos can be taken different ways, people would be overwhelmed if they did not block out some charitable appeals.

Some people think that the third world workers can work themselves out of poverty, in the way of the 'Asian tigers', without realising that the odds are stacked against them and they cannot repeat the success story of say, Hong Kong. The workers are very much subjugated and repressed in these assembly plants. It is difficult to see where they could help themselves, anyone found trying to start a union is quickly out of a job.

The Western corporations are just trying to do what they have to do in capitalism: make the biggest profit they can. If they don't their rivals will undercut them and they will eventually go out of business or be taken over. It is a dog-eat-dog world, and whereas people have to acquire visas and passports, corporations and capital have relative ease of flows across the world. Money eases the wheels of commerce, but the migration of people can be very much resented and resisted, as in Mexico with the self-styled American Border Patrol.

Capitalists, who make up the richest 5 percent or so in the world, may not be 'bad' people: they may give to charity, go to church and be kind to children and animals. But back at work, the system makes them behave in a ruthless race to make the biggest profits. If they don't, they go under. Charities like Oxfam and the Clean Clothes Campaign are just whistling in the wind. They may dampen down the worst excesses of the capitalist profit-seeking, but they can never stop exploitation until and unless they help to usher in a world, where people are free to enjoy their lives instead of making millions for the very few rich capitalists at the top.

**VERONICA CLANCHY**



### What's a "Living Wage"?

"A 'Living Wage' for all", alongside a photo with the caption "Fighting the growing gap between rich and poor", was the heading of the first election promise of the candidates of the Green Party in last month's general election :

"Green MPs will demand a 'Living Wage' to ensure low paid workers earn enough to provide for themselves and their families."

It's an old demand, going back to the ILP in the 1920s and beyond. Presumably what the Greens have in mind is a wage that would allow a worker to afford decent housing, enough proper food, new clothes, to go on holiday and run a car (but perhaps not this last, as they're Greens).

To find the level they consider necessary to achieve this you had to go to their full manifesto where they say :

"The Green Party will fight for a National Minimum Wage of 60% of net national earnings (currently this would mean a minimum wage of £8.10 an hour)."

As the current minimum wage is £5.80 an hour what they were proposing was a massive 40 percent increase, a promise that put them up with the Trotskyists. In fact they were promising more than the 'Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition' between Militant and the SWP which only promised an increase to £8 an hour.

Even so, £8.10 an hour for a 40 hour week is only £16,848 a year, which hardly qualifies as an adequate "living wage". But how's it going to be implemented? Getting employers to increase the wages of anyone paid less than £16,848 a year to this is easier said than done. The unions haven't been able to do it, otherwise it would have been done. But let's assume for a moment that a law forcing them to do this was passed. What would happen?

First, some employers would go bankrupt. Others would withdraw their capital from producing certain goods or services, so their price would rise. Eventually this would stabilise at a new, higher level at which employers would be able to make a profit even when paying the increased minimum wage. So the cost of living would go up, including for workers on the minimum wage.

Second, given the increased labour costs, the introduction of previously unused labour-saving machinery would become cheaper vis-à-vis employing living labour. Employers would do this. So there'd be job losses and unemployment, particularly amongst the unskilled, would grow.

Also it's not clear how the Greens' plan would reduce the gap "between rich and poor", at least not between those who figure on the *Sunday Times* Rich List (25 April) and those on the minimum wage. It might reduce the gap between low-paid and higher-paid workers, but this would just be a change within the working class – what we socialists have always called a "redistribution of poverty" – which would not affect the gap between the income of the working class and that of the capitalist class.

In any event, socialism is not about redistributing income and wealth from the rich to the poor, but about establishing a society that would not be divided into rich and poor. To adapt Marx, workers should replace the green demand for a "Living Wage" by the revolutionary demand for the "Abolition of the Wages System".

# “Listen, lady . . .”

## A Report from Greece

**THE ANGER was palpable, the body language unmistakable – our driver was one very pissed-off guy.**

We were on a short visit from our home in Turkey to Athens in neighbouring Greece; our son was working there for a few days from his home in the US and it was a rare chance to share some time together. It was also the day after a general strike protesting the EU/IMF bail-out terms that would adversely impact everybody except the wealthy ruling élite whose greed had bled the country dry. We had picked up a taxi at the airport; our driver spoke pretty good English and asking him about the economic and political situation seemed the natural thing to do.

“Listen, lady . . . Greece is a small country, only 11 million people; six million live here in Athens because there is nowhere else to get work. I came from Crete because it’s hard to make enough for my family on the islands.

“We thought, when we got rid of the military in 1974, that we would have democracy and accountability. What we got was a bunch of corrupt political families and their cronies who have made themselves rich and immune from prosecution for their crimes.

“They pay themselves multiple salaries for having their names on various committees and they also pay themselves for more working days than there are days in the year! But that’s not enough so they milk the system with government contracts and ‘commissions’ for their families and friends.”

Our driver pointed to two stadia as we drove by, “You see those? They were built for the 2004 Olympic Games; we were already bankrupt and still they borrowed more money to pay for constructions that were profiting them and their business partners. Now they are empty and falling to pieces – no one uses them.”

As we drove further into the city the piles of rubbish multiplied everywhere; building skips overflowing with days of stinking

household and business refuse. Our driver’s anger continued to mount.

“Do you realise how much these bastards are spending on weapons – guns, aircraft even ships and submarines? Billions of euros.” [the actual figure was 14 billion euros or 6 percent of GDP in 2007 and 2009 (Eric Reguly and Brian Milner *Globe & Mail* (1 May) ; i.e. half of the annual deficit problem, 13-14 percent of GDP, is caused by inflated spending on war preparation. Greece’s overall debt is greater than its annual GDP and ‘public’ spending accounts for 50 percent of GDP].

Our neighbours in Turkey have one of the largest militaries in the world, what could this little country do? Yet its politicians continue to make problems so they can put money in their own pockets from weapon sales.

“After independence in 1827 the Greek people never had a problem with the Turks – before that bastard Venizelos (Prime Minister 1910-1915 and instigator of numerous internal and external conflicts) went to war Greeks and Turks lived together and worked together; villages and towns were mixed.”

“Living is a struggle; we have pensioners protesting on the streets with us because their pensions are being cut. Not just frozen – cut. It’s the same for most government workers. We even have policemen joining the protesters. The politicians are not cutting their own wages – no – it’s us, the ordinary people who are paying for their corruption.

“Taxi licenses have gone up a huge amount and fares have been increased by 45 percent, so now I get fewer customers. Restaurants are closing – even the up-market ones have fewer people in them. Look over there, (pointing) we have many more people begging on the streets – homeless – there are even women with kids, but the politicians still have their fancy houses and their black Mercedes cars.”

During our short stay in Athens we spoke with several people from different economic backgrounds; bitterness was a uniting factor. Will the ‘unprecedented’ bail-out of Greece by the EU/IMF quieten the protests and shore up the euro? We doubt that very much – after all, it is not the people who are being salvaged but the corrupt élite and their corrupt system. The Greek people have a long history of defiance and rebellion against corrupt authority.

As yet another ‘socialist’ government prepares to protect what it and its cronies have stashed into their bank accounts and property developments, by once again doing the bidding of the financial ‘Masters of the Universe’ and stuffing the workers, we asked our angry taxi driver why he continued to put up with them. “What’s the alternative?” he queried. We could have told him, but he had a living to make and the taxi meter was running!

**Alan Fenn & Janet Surman**





# How shall we vote?

*Part of the deal for the Tory-LibDem coalition government is that there's to be a referendum on electoral reform. But is electoral reform really necessary?*

**W**e might as well give our answer straightaway: No, it isn't. A majority seeking to replace capitalism by socialism only requires one thing of an electoral system under capitalism – that it should allow a majority opinion to reflect itself as a majority of seats in parliament. Socialists are not interested in whether the system ensures a strong and stable government of capitalism nor in whether it ensures a fair representation of capitalist political parties. As the existing electoral system in Britain does allow a majority viewpoint to be translated into a majority of seats, we see no point in diverting any of our energies from our task of working towards the emergence of a socialist majority to supporting electoral reform within capitalism.

## Voting in socialism

However, since socialism will be a fully democratic society we do have an interest in what is and what is not a fair electoral system since such a system will be an essential part of the democratic decision-making and administrative structure of socialist society.

From the point of view of democratic theory, an electoral system should ensure that the persons elected really are representative. The case against the first-past-the-post system that applies in Britain is that it does not necessarily do this when there are more than two candidates. This is because it allows a candidate to be elected with less than 50 percent of the votes (that is to say, against the will of a majority of the voters), as were most MPs, of all parties, in the recent general election.

There are various ways of avoiding this. Organising a run-off between the top two candidates in a second ballot (as in France) or, what amounts to the same thing, allowing voters to place the candidates in order of preference (1, 2, 3, 4, etc) and, if no candidate gets 50 percent, to eliminate the bottom candidates and redistribute their votes amongst the others until one of them does reach this figure. This system, known as the Alternative Vote (the mysterious AV the media talks about), is widely used in trade unions for the election of their officials and is the system that is to be voted on in the proposed referendum.

A variant of AV, known as the Supplementary Vote or Instant Run-off, is already used in England for the election of mayors. Under it voters vote 1, 2 only (or just "1" if they want) and, if no candidate gets 50 percent, then the No 2 votes of the third and other candidates are redistributed between the top two. In other words, there is no chance of the candidate finishing third getting elected, as is possible under pure AV.

The system favoured by the Liberals is neither of these but the Single Transferable Vote (STV), which is used in regional and local elections in Northern Ireland and in local elections in Scotland. Under it voters again place the candidates in order of preference but in a multi-member rather than a single-member constituency. A candidate is

not elected unless, and until, after successive redistributions of the votes of the bottom candidates, they obtain a certain quota of votes. It is frequently described as a system of proportional representation even by its partisans but in fact it is not. It is essentially a system, like the Second Ballot and the Alternative Vote, for ensuring that those elected attain a minimum level of representativity. It is only incidentally that, in a context of competing political parties, it ensures the representation of minority parties enjoying a certain minimum, but not necessarily low, level of support amongst voters.

As all the above systems are compatible with democratic theory, no doubt, depending on historically-inherited circumstances and the preferences of people in a particular area, they will continue into socialist society for the various delegate bodies that will form part of its democratic decision-making structure, along with other systems such as choice by lot (as for juries today).

## Party Representation

Proportional representation, properly so-called, is a different matter as it presupposes the existence of competing political parties and was in fact devised precisely for such parties. It requires multi-member constituencies

(which can be the whole country, as in Israel and in Scotland and Wales for the election of MEPs) and party lists rather than individual candidates. A great variety of PR systems exist (a different version, mixed with first-past-the-post, is used in mainland Britain for the election of regional assemblies in Scotland, Wales and London) but these are all based on the principle that the seats

should be allocated to parties in more or less strict proportion to the number of votes obtained.

The essence of democracy is popular participation not competing parties. In socialism elections will not be about deciding which particular party is to come to 'power' and form the government. Politics in socialism will not be about coercive power and its exercise and so won't really be politics at all in its present-day sense of the 'art and practice of government' or 'the conduct of state affairs'. Being a classless society of free and equal men and women, socialism will not have a coercive state machine nor a government to control it. The conduct of public affairs in socialism will be about people participating in the running of their lives in a non-antagonistic context of co-operation to further the common good.

Socialist democracy will be a participatory democracy rather than the choice every four or five years, with or without proportional representation, between rival bands of professional politicians that passes for democracy today.

**ADAM BUICK**

**“The essence of democracy is popular participation not competing parties”**

# Darwin on human evolution

*A 150 years in June the famous confrontation over evolution took place between Bishop Wilberforce and TH Huxley. We begin a three-part series where we look at Darwin's theory of human evolution and the reaction of Marx and Engels to it.*

**O** (1859) was, arguably, the most shattering book of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Darwin's most famous book. It was not, of course, his only book, nor was it the one in which he dealt with the evolution of the human species, even though it sparked off the "Man's place in nature" debate. In fact, it took Darwin just over 11 years to publish his first book on the human species, (1871). Yet it did not have the same social impact as *The Origin*, and it is unlikely that the same celebratory hoopla will accompany its 150th anniversary in 2021.

Unlike *The Origin*, there is no evidence that either Marx or Engels bought a copy or even read *The Descent*, as there are no references to it in their collected works. However, the fact that Engels continued to discuss Darwin

win and Darwinian literature, especially in the context of German socialism, most importantly in (1878), and wrote the uncompleted in 1876 (he broke off the work in order to write , which makes extensive references to Darwin), shows that he kept up an interest in at least some of Darwin's later writings.

## Darwin on Human Descent

was published on the 24 February 1871, in two large volumes, at around 700 pages in length, and selling at 24 shillings (*The Origin* cost 15 shillings). The first print run was of 2,500 copies (compared to 1,250 for *The Origin*), increasing to 4,500 by the end of March, and 7,500 by the end of the year.

*The Descent* was the first of Darwin's works to deal with the human species, and was followed in 1872 by . Originally, Darwin had planned to discuss emotions in *The Descent*, but, as with much of his work, the material on it just piled up and required a separate volume. The only other published work dealing with humans was . This was published in , the first psychology journal, and was based on observations of his first child, his son William (affectionately called Doddy) carried out 37 years earlier.

This latter fact shows that Darwin had from the beginning included human beings in the scheme for his big book on Natural Selection (*The Origin* was only an abstract of this proposed big book) and it would not be something he needed to think anew for *The Descent*. In 1839 he had written:

"Looking at Man, as a Naturalist would any other Mammiferous animal, it may be concluded that he has parental, conjugal and social instincts, and perhaps others. The history of every race of man shows this, if we judge him by his habits, as another animal. These instincts consist of a feeling of love (& sympathy) or benevolence to the object in question. Without regarding their origin, we see in other animals they consist in such active sympathy that the individual forgets itself & aids & defends & acts for others at his own expense." (cited in White and Griffin *Darwin*: , 1995, p.248)

## Publish and Be Damned!

The application of natural selection to the human species would be the a lynchpin in the argument against critics, and it is likely that, as with other criticisms he rehearsed before the publication of *The Origin*, he would be aware that any failure to meet his critics would be fatal to the future of the concept of natural selection as a naturalistic explanation. So rather than being a late issue in the debate, Darwin saw it as being a necessary foundation from the very beginning of his studies.

Nevertheless, Darwin was famously reluctant to include the human species in *The Origin*. Even in 1857 (22 December), he wrote to Alfred Russel

Wallace about his reluctance to write about human evolution:

“You ask whether I shall discuss Man; I think I shall avoid the whole subject, as so surrounded with prejudices, though I fully admit that it is the highest and most interesting problem for the naturalist.”

In *The Origin*, he famously wrote that the application of natural selection to human kind would be possible only in the far future:

“In the distant future I see open fields for far more important researchers.... Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history. (Darwin, 1859; Penguin edition, 1968, p. 458)

But although he didn't discuss the human species, everybody knew he did. His readers were from the very beginning eager to jump the species gap. It was the human implications of natural selection that they were keen to discuss. Whilst it took Darwin until 1871, by which time the heat of the controversy had cooled somewhat, to publish his views on human evolution in the two volumes *The Descent*, others were not so reticent.

Unwilling or unable to defend his position, or the all too obvious implications of it, in the bear-pit of public debate, Darwin left it to his bulldog, Thomas Henry Huxley, to defend the theory from religious onslaught. Barely six months after the publication of *The Origin*, the famous British Association debate between Huxley and Bishop Samuel Willberforce took place in Oxford on 30

June, 1860. It was here that Huxley brilliantly replied to Willberforce's snide query as to whether Huxley was descended from an ape on his father's side or his mother's side, by retorting that he would rather have an ape for a grandfather than a man who misused his gifts to obscure scientific discussion by rhetoric and religious prejudice.

By the time Darwin came to publish *The Descent*, a number of others had already dealt with the issue of human origins: Huxley, Haeckel, Lubbock, Galton, Wallace, Tyndall, and Bagehot. But the Master had not spoken and the public were keen for him to make his pronouncements and settle the matter. Darwin dreaded this expectation. It is not improbable to think that he was glad that others had spoken first (and perhaps too hastily and without adequate evidence), but at least they had taken the first mad hail of flak. By now, some of the heat had been taken out of the battle, and there might be less anger directed his way. However, he knew he was going to be on the receiving end of some fury. As he wrote in a letter to St George Mivart, “Whenever I publish my book I can see that I shall meet with universal disapprobation, if not execution.”

And at Christmas 1870 he told Batholemew Sullivan that *The Descent* “would disgust you & many others.” But

after 11 years he was ready to show the world his views on the human species. However, even the political climate seemed against him. Radicals and agitators were causing problems and Darwin feared he might be depicted as a black-caped anarchist.

Darwin's fear of all hell breaking loose on him was not confirmed. To his relieved surprise, the reviews were muted. It seemed that the other Darwinians had successfully shifted the reading public towards acceptance of the evolution of the human species.

What he included in *The Descent* was to some degree conditioned by what his supporters had written earlier. In particular, unlike Huxley, who had dealt only with human physiological evolution, Darwin wanted to discuss the origins of some of the mental and moral faculties of humans in terms of natural selection. This was necessary as a riposte to what Wallace, especially, had said in his articles of 1864 and 1870. Wallace had come to the conclusion that whilst natural selection could account

for human bodily development, it could not do so for human mental development and the brain. To explain human mental development, Wallace resorted to the idea that humans were endowed with mind by an unseen spiritual power. Such a position was anathema to Darwin and he had written to Wallace saying that he feared that he might have murdered their child (that is, natural selection). It was, therefore, essential for Darwin to show that natural selection could account for

human intellectual and moral features, without the resort to some ineffable “unseen spirit.”

Wallace did in fact have a good enough reason to believe that the human mind had raised humans above all other animals, ensuring that they were not subject to the Malthusian hell that would later frighten and disgust Huxley in his lectures on (1893). For Wallace it was the human ability to create objects that would compensate for any natural weaknesses in dealing with the struggle for existence. In some respects, this difference is similar to that recognised by Marx and Engels, but they dealt with it materialistically rather than by an idealistic unseen spirit. (while Wallace became a believer in spiritualism).

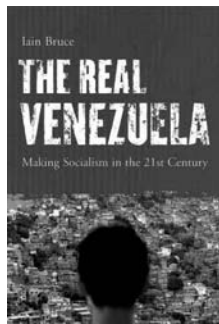
**ED BLEWETT**



**Contemporary cartoons of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce and T H Huxley**

**Massive reform programme**

***The Real Venezuela – Making Socialism in the 21st Century.* By Iain Bruce, Pluto Press 2008**



Venezuela, since Chavez, has been both hailed as champion of the poor and underclasses and also excoriated by leaders of the global capitalist hegemony. In this book Bruce takes no side but over a

period of several years and a number of visits to various parts of the country – urban, rural, factories and farms – he has interviewed ‘ordinary folk’ involved in co-operative initiatives ranging from the workplace to community planning, land reform and literacy programmes.

Throughout Bruce attempts to discover if the reality of various initiatives lives up to the rhetoric by comparing plans discussed at earlier visits to any noticeable changes several months or two or three years later, and, as would be expected, his findings are mixed. Whilst adult illiteracy was eliminated in a relatively short time and vast improvements in health care have been afforded to all by means of the Health Mission involving 20,000 Cuban medical staff, bringing visible, tangible changes especially to the poorest, some other workplace initiatives have floundered. Bruce offers a number of explanations for these failures later in the book after further investigation following up on his earlier interviews.

A recurring theme, endogenous development, (development created from within the country; Chavez - “if we want to put an end to poverty we have to give power to the poor”) is referred to as being one of the building blocks of the revolution, “socialism for the 21st century”. The call to empower the poor in opposition to the IMF’s view is manifest in the idea that spending on the poor is seen not as an expense but as an investment; education being a tool of empowerment so that those previously “buried in silence, obscurity and neglect have suddenly emerged” and become “protagonists both of their own individual stories and of the nation’s collective drama”.

As Bruce points out, all around the world, especially in the last 50

years, the poorest communities with almost no resources and few formal skills have constructed and installed infrastructure for themselves with no official help. Barrios, slums, shanty towns, call them what you will, in cities such as Jakarta, Rio de Janeiro, Johannesburg and Caracas, communities housing millions and millions of the world’s poorest – not helpless and passive as often claimed, but proactive and self-reliant and most of whom are underemployed and/or work in the informal sector, all of this revealing a history of self-organisation.

The chapter on ‘Democracy at Work’ gives an account of the attempt at a “radical extension of democracy” at Venezuela’s second biggest aluminium plant ALCASA which was “intended to be a test-bed and catalyst for a much wider change”. He lays out the history, the hopes, the set-backs, the workings of co-management, the divisions of labour, the participatory budget and the aim of spreading this model to other factories. Carlos Lanz, the president of ALCASA in 2005 was interviewed at length and he spoke of how the criteria of quality and efficiency would have to change and that to traditional indicators of efficiency and effectiveness would have to be added other categories such as social and environmental pertinence or appropriateness. “Profitability and growth, per se, are not the objective, but human development is.”

Two years later one of ALCASA’s activists explained some of the failures to Bruce, citing that ALCASA was an isolated example and a reminder that, “if you can’t build socialism in a single country then you certainly can’t build it in a single factory”. The overwhelming challenge facing any part of this move towards ‘socialism for the 21st century’ is that Venezuela is bogged down by the logic of capitalism and although there are many efforts to encourage and instil the alternative logic they are forever met with the incompatibility and antagonisms of the two systems.

In some areas Bruce notes examples of great achievements from communal councils including one where a mayor closed down his social development department because “the community has shown that they are running it better”, and there are many inspiring accounts of successful outcomes to community-inspired initiatives. However, it must be stated that many of the challenges faced by this ongoing attempt to transform society come from being entrenched in a monetary system which continues to allow

ample opportunity for graft and corruption, pre-established managers and bureaucrats wanting to hold on to their privileges and mafia-like organisations intent on keeping a hold on their share of the spoils.

All the way through the book, in the examples cited of substantial success, partial success or abject failure, the challenges relate directly or indirectly to the fact that products still have to be bought and sold, imported and exported to meet the requirements of the market and trying to set up an alternative logic of production continually clashes with the logic of capitalism. There is no mention from individuals interviewed or encountered in this book of abolishing money either sooner or later but there is recognition that there is still a long way to go and according to Bruce at the time of writing, mid-2008: “It looked as if it could go either way.”

We may judge the current stage of proceedings as being a massive reform programme but there are those who truly believe there are real possibilities for socialism here. In any case there are both cautionary tales and positive examples well worth discussing.

**JS**

**Helping to Survive**

***Why We Cooperate.* By Michael Tomasello: MIT Press £11.95.**



Young children are cooperative and helpful. At the age of eighteen months, almost all children will try to help an adult they have just met, for instance by opening a cupboard door

if the adult’s hands are full. This is one of the findings from experimental studies carried out with colleagues that Tomasello, a psychologist, reports in this short but informative volume.

Before they can be helpful like this, a child has to be able to perceive what another person wants to do, and to have the altruistic motive to help. Assisting others in this way seems to emerge naturally, before children have been trained by parents to behave in this manner. Moreover, concrete rewards undermine this helping, rather than stimulating it.

Helping is only one of three kinds of altruistic behaviour. The second is informing others by providing and sharing information, which children do naturally at twelve months (lying comes much later, and assumes pre-existing trust and cooperation). The third kind is sharing goods such as food, which again young children do in a reasonably generous way. Children are far more cooperative than chimpanzees, who do try to help humans in experimental situations but are less keen to share food or to inform fellow chimps.

From the age of around three years, children become more discerning in their altruism. For instance, they may share more with someone who was previously nice to them, or are more helpful to those who help others. The eventual outcome will be mutualism, where we all benefit from working together towards a common goal. Underlying this is a sense of 'we', a sense which is uniquely human.

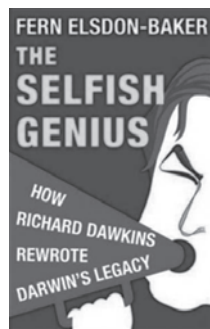
If our closest primate relatives, then, do not cooperate to anything like the extent that humans do, the question arises as to how and why this cooperativeness arose. Answers here must be less definitive, but Tomasello sees cooperative foraging for food as playing an essential role in making us, in his terminology, 'obligate collaborators'.

So in answer to claims that it is 'human nature' to be competitive, just say that no, we are by nature cooperative beings.

PB

## Dawkins criticised

**The Selfish Genius. How Richard Dawkins Rewrote Darwin's Legacy. By Fern Elsdon-Baker. Icon Books. £8.99.**



This is an attack on Dawkins's claim that the species he put forward in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* are the only one and true form of Darwinism. In this notorious book Dawkins

advanced the view that the unit of natural selection is not the species nor a group within a species nor the individual organism but the individual gene. It's a theory but it wasn't Darwin's, if only because Darwin had never heard of genes. So,

Elsdon-Baker argues, it is perfectly possible to be a "Darwinist" without accepting the "selfish gene" thesis.

Darwin's contribution was to collect a mass of evidence to show that the various different species of life came about through a process of natural selection (akin to the artificial selection of animal breeders, pigeon-fanciers and flower growers, but unplanned and over a much longer period, as environmental factors changed). Darwin was scrupulously honest and admitted that he did not know what caused the variations between individuals that the process of natural (and artificial) selection worked on. He suspected that it might have something to do with unknown "particles" governing the inheritance of an organism's features. Later, after his death, such particles were identified (even though they didn't have all the features Darwin had speculated they might have) and called "genes".

Elsdon-Baker outlines developments within biology since the publication of Dawkins's book which in her view undermine his view of genes as the only unit on which natural selection operates – so-called "junk DNA" may also play a role and genes can be modified by other natural factors than natural selection. But even if these developments undermine Dawkins's position, they don't challenge Darwin's basic conclusion that it is through natural selection that species evolved.

Elsdon-Baker also criticises Dawkins for linking his personal militant atheism with science, seeing this as counter-productive and unscientific. She claims that it cannot be said that it is a scientific fact that "God does not exist", on the grounds that it cannot be proved that a non-interventionist god does not exist. Maybe but this depends on what is meant by "exist".

A non-interventionist god, precisely because it did not intervene in the world of observable phenomena, could not be detected and so to all intents and purposes does not exist in any meaningful sense of the word. As to an interventionist god, as the mathematician and astronomer Laplace is supposed to have said to Napoleon, science does not need that hypothesis to explain the world of phenomena. Having said this, whether militant atheism (as opposed to practical, matter-of-fact materialism) is useful has been debated amongst socialists as well as scientists.

ALB

## The Official Journal of The Socialist Party of Canada



### Spring 2010 Edition out now

To obtain a copy send a cheque for £1.00 payable to "The Socialist Party of Great Britain" to 52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN.

**SOCIALISM OR YOUR MONEY BACK**

**NOW ONLY £1.00**

**The capitalist century, by a socialist journal. A running commentary of one hundred years of history - as it happened.**

- Two World Wars
- Russian Revolution
- General Strike
- The rise of Hitler
- Spanish Civil War
- Hiroshima
- The Silicon Chip
- Pop music
- ...and much more

*This collection will revive a jaundiced spirit... Every home should have one.*

**THE INDEPENDENT**

*A refreshing read...inspiring...a gem...*

**UNDERGROUND FOCUS**

Available inland for £1.00 (plus £2.00 postage) from the Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN. Cheques payable to 'The Socialist Party of Great Britain'

#### Picture Credits

Cover: David Harvey - © Daniel Lobo 2009  
 Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic  
 Clean Clothes Campaign - www.karat.org  
 p2: Greek strike - www.nowpublic.com. *Refugees 1960* - www.graphicwitness.org  
 p4: Deepwater Horizon fire, US Coast Guard, 21 April 2010 - Public Domain  
 p6: R.J. Rushdoony - www.tradebit.com  
 p11: Cameron & Clegg - © Office of Nick Clegg, 2009 Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported  
 p12: Defibrillator - © Ernstl 2006 Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic  
 p14: Chinese factory - © Robert Scoble, 2008, Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.  
 p16: Greek strike - www.nowpublic.com  
 p20: *The Real Venezuela* - us.macmillan.com. *Why We Cooperate* - mitpress.mit.edu  
 p21: *The Selfish Genius* - www.inthenews.co.uk  
 p24: Dharavi Slum in Mumbai - © Kounosu, 2008, GNU Free Documentation License  
 p24: Pope Benedict XVI - © Rob & Lisa Meehan, 2007, Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.

## Meetings

### London

Saturday evenings 6pm

**5 June** "Slums and Slumps: Housing under Capitalism?" - Paul Bennett

**19 June** "Class struggle and climate change - the politics of personal consumption." - Paddy Shannon

**3 July** "Business growth in conflict with the environment" -- Glenn Morris

**17 July** "Bitter Pill - Capitalism and the Pharmaceutical Industry"

- Dick Field

**31 July** "Reforming Capitalism or the Socialist alternative" - Vincent Otter  
Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN (nearest tube: Clapham North)

### East Anglia

Saturday, **12 June**, 2pm-5pm

FILM SHOWING

Theme - "Do You Feel Exploited?"  
(1 of 3)

A short (approx. 20 min.) film by Brendan Mcooney will be shown in the basement of The Workshop, 53 Earlham Road, Norwich NR1 3SP

### West London

Tuesday **15 June**

Discussion on Con-Lib coalition.

Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace, W4.

### Chester

Tuesday **22 June** 7.15 pm

Debate at Chester Dabating Society 'Should Capitalism Have a Future?'

Socialist speaker - Gywnn Thomas  
Quaker Meeting House, Union Walk, Frodsham Street, Chester, CH1 3LF .

## The Socialist Party Summer School



**Fircroft College, Birmingham**  
**23rd - 25th July 2010**

What kind of future do we want? For centuries, people have imagined technological utopias or nightmare dystopias. Meanwhile, how will capitalism adapt to ongoing economic and environmental concerns? And what kind of socialist society can we aim for as an antidote? Residential cost (inc accommodation and all meals) is £130, £80 conc. Non-residential cost (including meals) is £50. Please send a cheque for £10 (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) to flat 2, 24 Tedstone Road, Quinton, Birmingham, B32 2PD. For more information, e-mail Mike Foster at spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk

## Forty Million Refugees



THERE ARE no less than forty million refugees in the world today. Forty million people living in misery and hopelessness. Such is the appalling truth revealed in a little book recently published—*Refugees 1960* (Penguin Books, 2s. 6d.). (...)

[T]he authors fondly hope that in this world refugee year, the camps can be emptied and the conscience of the capitalist world stirred so deeply that every man, woman and child will be resettled. Just listen to this:

"Every country with room to spare should ease open its bureaucratic door and undertake to accept without 'ifs' or 'buts' a percentage of the sick or economically useless human beings, to balance what they have gained from the young, healthy immigrants who will be benefiting their economy without any cost to them in education or training."

A tall order indeed. It is hopeless to appeal to the conscience of a society which has been directly responsible for such a monstrosity. Far better to have a world where man can be free to travel over its surface without the futile restrictions of nationality, and where he can satisfy his needs from a sufficiency of wealth that only Socialism can make available.

But when all this has been said, it is still worthwhile to read *Refugees 1960*. Mainly, it is a plain, straightforward statement of very unpalatable facts, and no attempt has been made to grind a political axe. Yet by its very simplicity of style and presentation, this book shouts a condemnation of capitalist society from every page.

(From book review by E.T.C., *Socialist Standard*, June 1960)

## wsm forum

■ **want to talk about what you've just read?**

■ **discuss the questions of the day with party members and non-party members online.**

join the forum via [www.worldsocialism.org](http://www.worldsocialism.org)

## 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.

# Socialists in the election

**IN THE general election the Socialist Party stood one candidate, if only to show that we hold that a socialist-minded wage and salary working class can use the ballot box in the course of establishing socialism. Elsewhere we advocated a write-in vote for "World Socialism".**

The constituency, Vauxhall, just south of the Thames in central London, is one we had contested a number of times before. We had expected our opponents to be only the ordinary capitalist parties – Labour, Tory, LibDems and Greens – but in the event there were also candidates from the Christian Party (an attempt to introduce the US "Christian Right" here), the English Democrats (who want a separate parliament for England), the Animal Protection Party (hunt saboteurs challenging the sitting Labour MP, Kate Hoey, who is chair of the pro-hunting Countryside Alliance), and Workers Power (a breakaway Trotskyist group).

We met most of these candidates in three well-attended hustings, the last one in a church near the Oval attracting up to 200 people. The Post Office distributed 56,000 of our manifestos to households in the constituency.

As the Green Party candidate said he was an 'ecosocialist', this meant that there were three candidates saying they stood for socialism. This provided a case study of the difference between our and their approaches. The Green Party is not of course a socialist party and does not claim to be, even if individual members such as their candidate in Vauxhall do. Basically, the Green Party stands for a return to small-scale capitalism. Their election address made the same sort of promises as the main capitalist parties, only even less realistic – a minimum wage of £8.10 an hour, a non-means tested pension of £170 a week, a million new jobs installing free insulation in "every single home" and (of course) "protect our NHS".

The Trotskyist candidate made even wilder promises (seemingly on the basis of take what the openly capitalist parties are offering and multiply by three), such as:

- "Create three million new jobs – tax the rich to fund a huge programme of public works.
- £9 an hour minimum wage for all.
- Six weeks paid holiday as a minimum for all workers
- Cancel mortgage interest for working people.
- Scrap council tax – for a local wealth tax.
- Jobs for all, funded by taxing the rich and taking over the banks
- Benefits to be at level of minimum wage.
- Stop fare rises – slash bus and tube prices – make it free by taxing the rich.
- For pensions tied to average male earnings.
- Automatic and total payment [for pensioners] of all utility bills - gas, electricity, telephone and internet connection.(from *The Anticapitalist Manifesto for Vauxhall*)

All of this assumes the continued existence of the rich who are to be taxed – and so the continuation of

capitalism as a society where there are rich people, whose income comes from the exploitation of workers.

We, on the other hand, argued that, as capitalism was the cause of the problems, the only way to lastingly solve them was to replace capitalism and its production for profit and wages system with socialism, a society of common ownership, democratic control, production solely for use, and distribution according to the principle 'from each their ability, to each their needs'. We didn't advocate any reforms to capitalism, just socialism.

As a German group put it in a comment on the election they sent to us:

"Even fringe left-wing parties like Respect bow to the dictates of 'realism' and respect private property through their demands of 'taxation on the big corporations and the wealthy to fund public services' – a demand which requires big corporations to make the kind of profits which can then be taxed" (<http://shiftmag.co.uk/?p=349>).

Precisely. So, all the measures in the Trotskyist manifesto were supposed to be implemented under capitalism. Ridiculous. We doubt whether even their proposers believed this possible. In the event nobody else did either. True, we didn't do much better but the point is: when Trotskyists with their programme of "transitional" reforms are getting the same sort of vote as us who are advocating only socialism, what's the point of advocating reforms and not socialism? You might as well advocate taking over the bakery (and the wheatfields) rather than bigger and better crumbs.

The result was: Hoey (Labour) 21,498; Pidgeon (LD) 10,847; Chambers (Con) 9,301; Healey (Green) 708; Navarro (English Democrats) 289; Martin (Christian) 200; Lambert (Soc) 143, Drinkall (Workers Power) 109; Kapetanios (Animal Protection) 96.

The Socialist Party also contested three wards in the London borough elections held the same day. In Kentish Town (Camden) the Socialist candidate got 113 votes. In Ferndale ward (Lambeth) the three Socialist candidates got 82, 48 and 45 and in Larkhall (Lambeth) 48, 46 and 45.

## Thought About Joining The Socialist Party?

For further information about membership, return this form to **The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.**

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

POSTCODE.....



# Voice from the Back

## The Advance Of Poverty

Every day we can read about the expansion of capitalism and how new industrial and commercial giants are arising to challenge the supremacy of the USA. One of the leading candidates in this struggle is India. We are constantly hearing about the modernisation of that country and the supposed benefits of the expansion of capital. We don't hear so much about the plight of the working class there though. The following news item illustrates that the supposed benefits of capitalist modernisation are not so wonderful after all. "India has 100 million more people living in poverty, official figures show – 37.2 per cent of the population compared with 27.5 per cent in 2004 – with 410 million people below the UN poverty line of \$1.25 a day" (*Times*, 19 March). Surviving on a pound a day while the owning class of that country now boast of the richest men in the world. "Indian names now figure prominently on the league tables of the wealthiest people on the planet. The country now boasts 47 billionaires, up from 12 in 2005 and just nine at the turn of the millennium, compared with 10 in France and 35 in Britain" (*Observer*, 9 May). That's capitalism for you – surviving on £1 a day contrasted with the lives of billionaires.



Mumbai on a dollar

surging youth unemployment, boosted by graduates and mid-career professionals searching for jobs. Most applicants are aged between 20 and 26, although British Gas said some were in their fifties" (*Sunday Times*, 18 April). Not only do we have workers madly competing for the right to be exploited but we have workers in employment working overtime for no

extra pay. "One person in four is working longer than ever but few are paid extra for putting in overtime.

A survey of 2,000 workers, carried out for Santander, found that the average employee in the UK is working

a 41-hour week for an annual wage of £27,150. One in seven of those polled is doing at least 11 hours of overtime every week, but only two in five are paid extra" (*Times*, 4 May).

## Fifty Years Of Gradualism

One of the oppositions to world socialism is that rather than have a complete transformation of society we could have piece by piece gradual change. Well let us look at how that has worked out in relation to the environment.

"Sir David Attenborough has warned that Britain's wildlife is being destroyed thanks to man's impact on the environment. The naturalist made his comments in the foreword to a new book, *Silent Summer*, in which 40 prominent British ecologists explain how humankind is wiping out many species. It comes fifty years after the publication of *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson's acclaimed book on pollution of wildlife that helped the growth of the environmental

movement worldwide and led to a ban of some pesticides in Britain" (*Sunday Telegraph*, 25 April). So fifty years after the alarm was sounded the position is even worse. That is gradualism for you. The drive for bigger and bigger profits means that the environment is of little importance.

## A Papal View Of Society

There are many ways to look at society. What are the most important aspects of present day society? Socialists might say the fact that a third of the world is starving, or that we live in a society that could be annihilated in a nuclear holocaust or even that in the drive for profits we risk the delicate balance of the global environment. None of these considerations entered into the reasoning of the Pope when he recently visited Portugal. "The Pope yesterday condemned gay marriage and abortion as 'among the most insidious and dangerous challenges' to society, as Portugal prepared to legalise same-sex partnerships next week. Benedict also criticised Catholics 'ashamed' of their faith and too willing to 'lend a hand to secularism'. Ninety per cent of Portuguese define themselves as Catholic, but Portugal's society is increasingly secular, with far fewer than a third saying they attend Mass regularly" (*Times*, 14 May). Starvation, worldwide slaughter or global warming? Not as

important as abortion or same-sex relationships according to His Holiness – no wonder the pews are emptying.



## The Whip Hand

"British Gas has received more than 65,000 applications for 600 gas fitter apprenticeships. The scheme pays £5,000 a year, plus expenses, to train staff to repair boilers and radiators. The 100-to-1 ratio of applicants to openings, twice the usual ratio, has been caused by

