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# socialist

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# standard

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

## Will the waves rule Britannia?



## Capitalism throws us in at the deep end



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# socialist standard

website: [www.worldsocialism.org](http://www.worldsocialism.org)

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# Introducing The Socialist Party

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

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

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

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

## Editorial

# Saddam's death penalty

It was nauseating to hear President Bush pontificate about the decision to execute Saddam and using words such as "victory" and "justice". If Bush could have cited any moral superiority he has over Saddam then his words might have carried weight, but the simple truth is that this was one opportunistic and blood-drenched killer revelling in the misfortune of another and, far worse, for political expediency.

The very fact that the death penalty was passed on Saddam two days before the US mid-term elections, at a time when Bush's popularity in opinion polls was receding a serious fall, can hardly be ignored. Saddam had been in custody for two-and-a-half years before any charge was levelled against him and the Iraqi Higher Criminal Court miraculously came into existence the same week he was captured. When the time came Saddam was no longer a tool of US foreign policy but an instrument of Republican Party domestic policy.

The first thing to observe is that Saddam's trial was not an Iraqi legal procedure; it was a White House coordinated process from start to finish. It was funded by a \$138 million grant from Congress and orchestrated by a large team of staff know as the Regime Crimes Unit and operating from the US Embassy in Baghdad.

It was Washington and London who selected the trial judges, who were then sent to London to be trained on how to handle the case and who were then taken to Italy to rehearse the trial.

Several judges stepped down, one having been rounded on by the Iraqi government because he was considered to lenient. Three defence lawyers were kidnapped and murdered and a similar fate befell one witness for Saddam.

Many have asked why Saddam could not have been tried in a similar manner to Slobodan Milosevic whose case was heard at The Hague. Quite simply Washington would

have pooh-poohed such a suggestion, just as it has refused to recognise the International Criminal Court or judgements laid down by the International Court of Justice. Indeed the US has little regard for any international legislation or treaty, including the Geneva Convention. All are seen as meddling in the pursuit of its global corporate interests.

Historical amnesiacs would do well to remember that Saddam came to power via CIA assistance and was financed and chemically-armed by the West for many years in his war against Iran. Successive American and British governments turned a blind eye to his atrocities, including his mustard gassing of Iranians and the poison gas massacre of 5,000 Kurds at Halabja in 1988, only showing concern when he invaded Kuwait without the nod from Washington and worried the pro-American oil sheiks of Saudi Arabia in the process.

From 1991 up until the US-led invasion of 2003, an estimated 1 million Iraqis died as a result of UN Sanctions. When, Madeleine Albright, the US secretary of State to Iraq, was questioned on American TV about the deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children as a result of economic sanctions, she commented that it was "a price worth paying." Since the 2003 invasion some 655,000 Iraqis have been killed. Throughout Saddam's 24-year reign he never killed this many humans. Meanwhile, US-led intervention in Iraq in 15 years has resulted in the deaths of almost 1.75 million. And this is in the name of justice!

There is of course nothing the warring factions in Iraq have to celebrate about the death penalty. Their lot has not been improved one iota since the US-led invasion and even if they live in a relatively stable Iraq they will exist as wage slaves, their lives subordinated to dictates of profit-merchants and the whims of religiously-aligned warlords, their future always over-shadowed by the dangerous game of geo-politics, their blood worth far less to the powerful than the country's oil.

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# Hot Air Emissions



change could be irreversible."

This is not the much-publicised *Stern Report* of October, but an earlier report, *Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change*, published by the UK government in January of this year, based on research presented by speakers at a conference held by the UK Meteorological Office in February 2005. (*BBC Online*, 30 January).

Since then the heat and emissions released by politicians of all persuasions has increased to dangerous and unsustainable proportions. A summit in Monterrey in Mexico in October was hailed by the 20 biggest global polluters as 'very positive', then more noise over the *Stern* report later that month, which tended to be taken more seriously by politicians since they listen to economists with infinitely greater attention than they ever listen to scientists. But then in November the politicians were complaining that the politicians weren't doing anything, as Kofi Annan despaired at the UN climate summit in Nairobi that global warming was as "grave a threat as conflict, poverty and the spread of weapons." Sceptics, he added, with a politician's ear for the ringing soundbite, were "out of step, out of arguments and out of time".

The only politician in Britain in recent weeks to actually do anything, as opposed to making speeches and going to junkets in Mexico for Important High-Level Talks, has been dear old Red Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, who has infuriated the Kensington and Mayfair set by announcing a punishing £25 per day congestion charge for Band G motor vehicles, which is effectively the SUV-class 4x4 'Chelsea tractor', emitters of carbon roughly double that of any other car. Many of these can be seen outside school gates during the school run, and are apparently second family cars used for kids, shopping and round-town errands, themselves the most carbon-inefficient types of journey. Ken observes correctly that people who can afford these monsters can afford any mainstream car so their decision to buy these heavy polluters and stick two fingers up at the world is clearly deliberate.

Most people who have even the mildest concern over capitalism's damage to the planet must surely have the most searing contempt for anti-social yahoos in bull-bar Mitsubishi tankettes, so it was not surprising that this measure was greeted with ecstatic cheers, even though it won't come in until 2009. What a pity Ken went and spoiled it all immediately by getting himself into trouble over a freebie junket (by carbon-reckless air travel, of course) to Venezuela to visit his soul-mate Chavez, at the council taxpayer's expense. Never mind, the thought is what counts.

And the thought, in government circles, is all about counting at the moment, carbon counting. The UK government has announced, through the annual speech made by its velvet glove puppet the Queen, that its target of reducing carbon emissions by 60 percent by 2050 will now be enshrined in law, with a Carbon Committee set up to make sure it happens (*BBC*

"It is now plain that the emission of greenhouse gases... is causing global warming at a rate that is unsustainable", writes Tony Blair in the preface to the UK government report which concludes that "there is only a small chance of greenhouse gas emissions being kept below dangerous levels." When questioned about this report *Radio 4* Margaret Beckett, environment minister, states "we could come to a tipping point where

*Online*, 15 November). They'll check every five years or so and make a speech, or an excuse, depending on where they're up to. So, lots of noise again for now, and leisure enough not to worry for the next five years, until everybody's forgotten about the targets. And what if the targets haven't been met then? Well, they can just hold over publishing the report until a useful 'bad news day' comes along.

Everyone's showing willing, and that's nice. The Nairobi conference was held, not to do anything, but to agree a timetable to discuss globally binding emissions targets in time for the expiry of the Kyoto Protocol in 2012. Nobody stuck to the Kyoto Protocol in the first place, but nevertheless it is very important to hold talks to establish agreement over the next generation of agreements that nobody will stick to either.

The European Union has set itself the pious goal, not of reducing total carbon emissions, but of containing the increase to levels which will push the average temperature up by 'only' 2 degrees. An increase of 2 degrees centigrade is enough to melt all the ice in Greenland, but this is considered acceptable considering the dire consequences if they go even higher than that. To keep to this target, atmospheric carbon - originally 227 parts per million (ppm) at pre-industrial levels and now at 380 ppm - needs to be stabilised at around 450 ppm. Speaking on the same programme as Margaret Beckett in January, the UK government's chief scientific adviser, Sir David King, called this 'unlikely'. "We're going to be at 400 ppm in 10 years' time", he said. "To aim for 450 would, I am afraid, seem unfeasible." So why set such a target then? Well, they've got to say something, haven't they?

It's all a question of motivation.

The ugly truth is probably that Europe is hoping to trade its problem away with the new carbon emissions trading system, whereby they get to smoke and Africa gets the cancer. Russia didn't even turn up to Monterrey, presumably because global warming doesn't seem so bad when you've got frostbite in Irkutsk, and it's a very chill wind that blows nobody any good. The Chinese, meanwhile, on being invited to join in huge emissions reductions at a time when they are the fastest industrialising nation on Earth, smile politely at this blatant imperialist attempt to clip their dragon's wings, and carry on about their filthy business, supremely confident that the greedy foreign investment will continue unabated in the free-for-all of their boomtown economy.

The people who are most worried are not the Europeans or the Americans or the Russians or the Chinese, it is the so-called developing countries who in fact are never allowed to develop and who occupy the equatorial belt which is soon likely to become an incineration zone. That they are less guilty of pollution than anyone, but are going to more punished than everyone, is yet another example of the sort of 'justice' meted out by an economic system in which nice guys finish last and rich guys fix all the races. Their coastal infrastructures are going to be flooded out, their wetlands will dry out, their crops will die, and wars and migrations will escalate. The Nairobi conference, the first climate change conference to be held in that continent, aimed to bring another dimension to the debate, that of human rights. It was, said Kofi Annan and other delegates, a human right not to be killed by the callous self-serving vandalism of other people's behaviour. Perhaps this is true in some moral sense. But capitalism is a blind process

of profit accumulation. It doesn't understand morals. The administrators of capitalism serve a supremely ignorant master. For all their hot air, they are never going to challenge the thing they most believe in. They will still be making speeches while the world burns.



## Zionism

Dear Editors,

I agree with Howard Moss that the aim should be for articles to give the socialist perspective (Letters, November *Socialist Standard*). However it is not so unusual for articles to outline some aspect of history or current events and only give reference to the socialist aim in the concluding comments. As socialists we wish to be as well informed as possible. I found Susan Nathan's book *The Other Side of Israel* (now available in paperback) both moving and informative. My concern is that the article (intended as a review) may not fairly represent the book as it only refers to some aspects of its content. For example it does not mention the author's background. Her father was born in South Africa, the son of Jewish refugees from Lithuania. She is thoroughly aware of Jewish history, including the discrimination suffered by her great-grandfather in Lithuania, and had first hand experience of apartheid in South Africa. The book does not claim that conditions in Israel are identical to those that formerly existed in South Africa - the "petty elements" are absent. As stated in the article the term 'apartheid' is applied in a specific sense and its use is only emotive if you do not agree that Israeli Arabs are treated as second class citizens.

PAT DEUTZ

## Structured party

Dear Editors,

I am a bona fide socialist and I will never be anything else. I am totally opposed to

inequality, exploitation, oppression, poverty, hunger, war and everything associated with capitalism. However I do find fault with your outlook. I can't see how we can challenge capitalism without being organised in a structured socialist party with an elected leadership. I believe that the leadership should have no special privileges, but to vigorously pursue party policy which would be decided at conference.

You criticise Lenin and Trotsky in your ideas, but I think the Bolsheviks', with Lenin and Trotsky, was the most correct that the Russian revolution could have been in organising socialism in that era. So I would like you to educate me by explaining a better way of achieving socialism.

C. DOBSON, Wigan

Reply:

We do stand for a "structured socialist party" but on quite different lines from Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

Starting from the view that, left to themselves, the working class can only develop a trade union consciousness, they stood for organising as a vanguard party to lead the workers. They also said that this party should be organised on a top-down basis with a "leadership" which, while perhaps formally elected, had the power to make policy and order other members what to do. Such a structure may have been necessary to overthrow Tsarism but not to establish socialism - which they didn't anyway, only a form of state capitalism.

We say that the socialist political party should be organised on a quite different basis: the power to make policy should lie with the membership through delegate

conferences and referendums; there should be no party leadership, only an executive or administrative committee charged with arranging for the policies decided by the membership to be implemented. We also say, contrary to Lenin, that workers can advance beyond trade unionism and can understand socialism. When a sufficient majority of them have, and have organised themselves democratically, ready to take over and run society, they can send mandated delegates to parliament to take control of political power and use it to end capitalism and coordinate the change-over to socialism - *Editors*.

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**Central London branch.** 2nd Tuesday and 4th Monday. 7.30pm. Head Office 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4. Tel: **0207 622 3811**

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

email: julianvein@blueyonder.co.uk

**South London branch.** 1st Mon. 7.45pm. 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

**Pimlico.** C. Trinder, 24 Greenwood Ct, 155 Cambridge Street, SW1 4VQ. Tel: **020 7834 8186**

### MIDLANDS

**Birmingham branch.** Tel: Ron Cook, **0121 553 1712**. Corres: David Coggan, 13 Bowling Green Road, Stourbridge, DY8 3TT. Tel: **01384 348835**. email: djcoggan@hotmail.com

### NORTHEAST

**Northeast branch.** Corres: John Bissett, 10 Scarborough Parade, Hebburn, Tyne & Wear, NE31 2AL. Tel: **0191 422 6915** email: johnbissett@blueyonder.co.uk

### NORTHWEST

**Lancaster branch.** P. Shannon, 10 Green Street, Lancaster LA1 1DZ. Tel: **01524 382380**

**Manchester branch.** Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB.

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

**Cumbria.** Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG

**Carlisle.** Robert Whitfield. email: rewabr13@yahoo.co.uk

tel: 07906 373975

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**01706 522365**

**Southeast Manchester.** Enquiries:

Blanche Preston, 68 Fountains Road,

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**Cambridge.** Andrew Westley, 10

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**Canterbury.** Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope

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Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB.

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**East Anglia branch** meets every two

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meetings page for details). 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**.

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Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road,

Glasgow. Richard Donnelly, 112

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Tel: **0141 5794109** Email:

richard.donnelly1@ntlworld.com

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

Salcoats, KA21 5AA. Tel: **01294**

**46994.** derricktrainer@freeuk.com

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

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

Tel: **01328 541643**

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

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Centre, Kennilworth Rise, Dedridge,

Livingston. Corres: Matt Culbert, 53

Falcon Brae, Ladywell, Livingston,

West Lothian, EH5 6UW. Tel: **01506**

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**Germany.** Norbert. Email:

weltsozialismus@gmx.net

**Norway.** Robert Stafford. Email:

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#### COMPANION PARTIES

##### OVERSEAS

**World Socialist Party of Australia.**

P. O. Box 1266 North Richmond 3121,

Victoria, Australia. Email:

commonownership@yahoo.com.au

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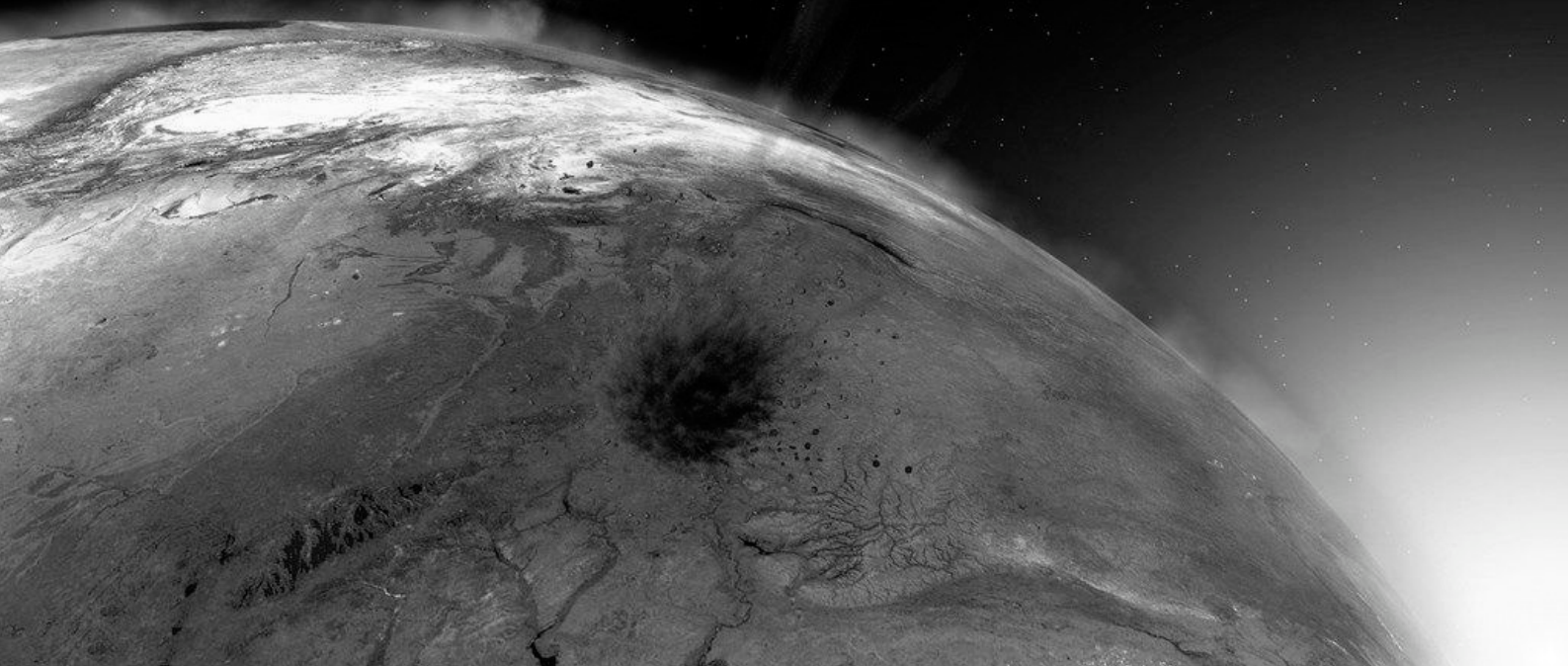
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# Capitalism and climate change



*"The Market has failed. Long Live the Market!" is the illogical conclusion of the Stern Report on the Economics of Climate Change published at the end of October.*

Climate change", the report says, "presents a unique challenge to economics: it is the greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever seen". Further, if nothing is done - if "business-as-usual", or BAU as the report calls it, continues - things will get worse: "Our actions over the coming decades could create risks of major disruption to economic and social activity, later in this century and in the next, on a scale similar to those associated with the great wars and the economic depression of the first half of the 20th century".

This devastating description of one of the consequences of capitalism doesn't come from some socialist critic of the profit system, but from a pillar of the Establishment, Sir Nicholas Stern, a former chief economist at the World Bank and now an adviser to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The failure in question is that the spontaneous operation of the market has resulted in the release of so much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere that it has caused the average world temperature to rise and to go on rising (because of the time lag between cause and effect) for the next forty or fifty years. The market-oriented enterprises responsible - coal, oil and gas burning power stations, heavy industry, airlines, rail and other transport firms, car

producers - have only had to pay for those costs that they have had to buy on the market; as releasing carbon dioxide costs them nothing it is not something they have had to take into account. So they haven't, with the results described by Sir Nicholas Stern in the first part of his report.

As a conventional economist, he sees the solution as making the polluters from now on pay in one form or another. Traditionally this would have been through taxation and regulations. Stern still sees a role for these, but proposes to give spontaneous market forces a second chance via so-called "carbon trading".

## Carbon trading

Under this scheme there would be an international agreement fixing an overall level of carbon emissions for each country which would be less than what it currently emits; that country would then set enterprises within it an allowed level of emissions. If they exceed this level they would be fined. On the other hand, if they emit less carbon than allowed they can sell the unused part of their quota to some other enterprise even in another country. This other enterprise can then emit more carbon than allowed to it, without having to pay the fine.

Carbon trading is the buying and selling of such "permits to pollute". It is

supposed to help the environment by giving polluting firms a monetary incentive to reduce their emission even lower than the allowed level; the more they reduce their emissions below this level the more money they can make from selling their surplus permits. The buyers of these permits would be firms having difficulty reducing their emissions below the level allowed them; if they failed to reduce to this level they would still have to pay something, but the idea is that buying a permit would be cheaper than paying the fine.

A market for "permits to emit carbon dioxide" would thus develop. Where there's a market there will also be middlemen, who in this case will specialise in the buying and selling of these permits. There would also be the possibility of speculating on future changes in their price.

Two such schemes already exist. The Emission Trading Scheme, run by the European Union, and the Clean Development Mechanism provided for under the Kyoto Treaty. One carbon trader, James Cameron (who had helped negotiate the Kyoto Treaty), has said of such schemes:

"What is happening in these markets is the creation of environmental value. The deals being done will mean large volumes of greenhouse gases are being taken out using the capitalist system" (Times, 12

September).

### Will it work?

That's the theory and it is true that, to work, such schemes depend on the emergence of profit-seeking carbon traders like Cameron. Actually, however, these schemes are still bureaucratic attempts to manipulate the market and so are open to political interference, mismanagement and corruption, as the experience of the EU's scheme shows. Under it member-state governments and the European Commission negotiate quotas per country and then the countries allocate the quotas to individual enterprises (mainly power stations) within their borders.

But instead of governments vying with each other to reduce carbon emissions, they have sought to win advantages for their own industries by asking for, and then allocating, over-generous quotas, with a view to allowing their industries to profit by selling permits they never needed in the first place. The trouble is that, if the quotas are too generous, the supply of permits will far exceed the demand, so undermining the whole scheme. Which has threatened to happen, as the *Times* (9 October) reported:

"The future of Europe's Emissions Trading System (ETS) hangs in the balance as officials in Brussels prepare to do battle this month with member states to uphold the credibility of a market in permits to pollute. The market stands accused of generating billions of euros in windfall profits for utilities at the expense of consumers.

The European Commission needs to clamp down hard on member states, market analysts say, if it is to rescue the ETS, which has fallen into disrepute over lax carbon emission targets set for the first phase of the scheme from 2005-07. The ETS was devised to create a market incentive to cut greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change, but the market was undermined from the beginning by weak-willed governments. The system imposes a cap on emissions of carbon dioxide, forcing companies that exceed their allowance to buy 'permits to pollute' from companies that manage to cut emissions. European governments were too generous with the caps, causing the price of permits to collapse in May. Lack of confidence in the market encouraged power generators to switch from cleaner gas to dirty coal.

The cap in the first phase was 100 million tonnes more than actual emissions in the first year . . ."

British capitalists have been complaining that the less stringent quotas proposed by other governments would give their enterprises a competitive edge over British ones:

"Britain has submitted its carbon allocation plans to the European Union before most other countries, generating fears that ministers will damage industry's competitiveness through their eagerness to be in the vanguard of environmental improvements. ( . . . )

Martin Temple, director general of the EEF, the manufacturers' organisation, said:

"Yet again, the UK is in the vanguard whilst the rest of Europe remains in the starting blocks. Not only have we published targets ahead of the majority of our major European competitors, but set limits which are likely to be far more stringent. While

much of the immediate burden will be felt by the electricity generators, these costs will be passed on to industry and other energy consumers. At a time of rapidly rising energy prices, the Government's desire to show leadership risks further eroding our competitiveness" (*Times*, 22 August).

Some of this will be upping the ante in negotiations, and the scheme will survive, perhaps in a more rigorous form. But if such a scheme experiences difficulties like this in the EU which, with a relatively strong inter-governmental body in the Commission, reasonably reliable statistics and a relatively corruption-free civil service, is the part of the world where it stands the most chance of working, what is the likelihood of one working at world level, as Stern insists would be necessary?

### Competition not cooperation

In fact, what are the chances of any world agreement to reduce carbon emissions being achieved? Clearly, climate change is a world problem and as such can only be tackled at world level. But, as the experience of the Kyoto Treaty of 1997

## 'President Bush stated that "I walked away from Kyoto because it would damage America's economy, you bet"'

shows, the chances of the world's major capitalist states agreeing on an adequate and effectively enforced programme are practically nil.

The reason for this is mentioned, but only in passing, in the Stern report:

"Costs of mitigation of around 1% of GDP are small relative to the costs and risks of climate change that will be avoided. However, *for some countries and some sectors the costs will be higher. There may be some impacts on the competitiveness of a small number of internationally traded products and processes*" (emphasis added).

Quite, but then Stern adds complacently, not to say idiotically, "These should not be overestimated, and can be reduced or eliminated if countries or sectors act together".

If it is going to be that easy to get international cooperation on reducing carbon emissions why has the US consistently refused to sign the Kyoto Treaty? And why have most of the wars of the last century had oil as a factor either directly or indirectly? And what about the current war in Iraq - and other conflicts in the Middle East and Central Asia - , are these not evidence of the near impossibility of getting international concord and harmony about oil, the burning of which is the root of the problem of global warming?

President Bush, in a television interview with Trevor MacDonald when he was in Britain for the G8 Summit last year, bluntly stated the US government's view of Kyoto:

"There was a debate over Kyoto, and I

made the decision . . . that the Kyoto treaty didn't suit our needs. In other words, the Kyoto treaty would have wrecked our economy . . . I walked away from Kyoto because it would damage America's economy, you bet. It would have destroyed our economy. It was a lousy deal for the American economy" (ITV, 4 July).

The clue to why the Bush administration took this position can be found in the figures for carbon dioxide emissions per person by country. A map published in the *Times* (30 October) showed that only three countries exceed 15 tonnes per person - the US, Canada and Australia. EU countries all fall in the 5-10 tonnes range. In fact the US releases more than twice as much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere per person than Britain: around 20 tonnes compared with 9.5. (Incidentally, such statistics are often interpreted wrongly to mean that the average individual American releases twice as much carbon as the average British individual; what in fact it means is that US industry releases twice as much carbon as European industry per head of population. If individuals in the US, or in Britain for that matter, were to reduce their personal release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, as for instance by not driving gas-guzzling cars or by turning off the lights when they leave a room, that would only marginally reduce the figures.)

Bush and his government are charged with looking after the overall, general interests of US capitalist corporations. They concluded that, because US industry depends proportionately more on energy derived from burning fossil fuels than most other countries and trading blocs, it would cost it comparatively more to reduce carbon emissions, so undermining its competitiveness vis-à-vis its main rivals on the world market, especially Europe. This is why US corporations have hired scientists to rubbish the proposition that the current global warming is mainly caused by human industrial activity (they suggest a natural cause such as a slight warming of the Sun). And is why the US government will walk away from any other scheme to reduce carbon emissions that would put its industries at a competitive disadvantage.

We are not in a position to judge who is right about what is causing global warming but it is happening and, whatever its cause, its consequences - changing agricultural productivity in different parts of the world, population migrations, a rise in sea level - can only be dealt with by planned and coordinated global action within the framework of a united world. Only in a frontierless world in which the Earth's natural and industrial resources have become the common heritage of all humanity can the necessary measures be taken to stabilise carbon emissions and to deal with the consequences of global warming.

At one time even supporters of capitalism would have proposed, if not a world capitalist government, at least some world body with real powers to coordinate a response. Now, all they can come up with - as in the Stern report - is to rely on profit-seeking "carbon traders" to solve the problem. If that's all capitalism can offer, then, in the words of Private Fraser, we are all doomed - unless, that is, we establish world socialism.■

ADAM BUICK



# The Stern gag - capitalist policies for capitalism's problems



*"At every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing over nature - but that we, with flesh and blood and brain, belong to nature and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly. We are gradually learning to get a clear view of the indirect, more remote social effects of our productive activity, and so are afforded the opportunity to control and regulate these effects well. This regulation, however, requires a complete revolution in our existing mode of production . . . in our whole contemporary social order"*

**Y**ou could be forgiven for thinking the above quotation came from a modern-day ecologist or environmentalist, commenting on impending global ecological catastrophe and drawing upon the myriad reports currently in existence, written by concerned scientists, that portend cataclysmic changes to our life-styles if we don't stop abusing our natural environment immediately. The quote is in fact 131 years old and is taken from *Dialectics of Nature*, written by Frederick

Engels (1875).

Let's get one thing straight from the outset. Socialists have been warning about the effects of capitalism's penny-pinching production methods and how they impact on the wider environment for well over a hundred years, and it is often with despair that we reiterate Engels' message from the later 19th century, more so now that state-of-the-art technology exists that provides hard evidence as to the exact effects of capitalist production.

## **Global disaster**

It was, therefore, not with any great sigh of relief, or with shock and disbelief, that socialists received the findings of the much-trumpeted Stern report on climate change and indeed the government's reaction to it. It does make for grim reading, suggesting that time is running out to really address the environment question - previous opportunities having been pathetically squandered at the Hague and Kyoto Summits - and that the possibility of preventing a global disaster is "already almost out of reach".

The 700-page report, commissioned by the Treasury and carried out by the former World Bank chief economist, Sir Nicholas Stern, argues that environmental problems will be "difficult or impossible to reverse" unless something is done now. It paints a disturbing picture of the future of the planet if overall global temperatures rise by just two degrees Centigrade. It suggests that four billion people could face water shortages, that sixty million Africans would be exposed to malaria and that forty percent of the world's species would face extinction.

Two-hundred million more people, it

goes on, could be exposed to hunger and that figure could rise to 550 million if the temperature rose one extra degree because of a knock-on 34 percent drop in crop yields across Africa and the Middle East. Australia's arable land would become simply too hot to sustain cereal crops. Another couple of degrees rise in temperature would, according to the report, see the ice glaciers of the Himalayas melt, depriving 300 million Chinese of a water supply. Rising sea levels would inundate half the world's major cities, creating more homelessness, and increased ocean acidity would result in a serious decline in fish stocks.

The report further informs us that "changes in weather patterns could drive down the output of the world's economies by an amount equivalent to up to £6 trillion a year by 2050, almost the entire output of the EU." But all is not lost, believe Chancellor Gordon Brown and Environment Secretary David Miliband. They point to the 'positive message' arising from the report; this being that the world has the means to avoid the awaiting cataclysm. Money can be thrown at the problem - the earth-shattering sum of one per cent of Global GDP should suffice; a figure, incidentally, which is dwarfed by global military spending.

## **Whiff of profits**

Responding to the report, Miliband sounded quite optimistic. Interviewed by the *Independent* (30 October), he said: "The second half of his message is that the technology does exist, the financing, public and private, does exist, and the international mechanisms also exist to get to grips with this problem - so I don't think



it's a catastrophe that he puts forward. It's a challenging message."

What we are offered are capitalist remedies, and to make it all the more attractive there are profits to be had - well, the master class has to have some damned incentive before they act. As the *Independent* reported: "Combating climate change could become one of the world's biggest growth industries, generating around \$250bn of business globally by 2050." Providing, that is, that we still have a planet worth saving in 50 years time.

Environmental disaster and the best capitalist politicians can think up is to tempt the master class with the whiff of profits to come if they agree to mend their ways! Indeed, the report is punctuated with terms such as "cost-effective" and "profitability". Well, Stern is after all a leading world economist so his thoughts are naturally with his associates in big business. The very people who have disregarded the effects of their production methods on the natural environment for hundreds of years are now being asked to show it some mercy! Global environmental catastrophe can be halted by throwing money at the problem!

The simple fact is that businesses will not take the risk of falling behind in the struggle for profits and nor will any government enforce policy that will result in a drop in the profits of its respective capitalist class. This is exactly what President Bush cited when he pulled the USA out of the Kyoto Agreement. He is no doubt aware that the USA consumes more than one quarter of global oil production and is accountable for one quarter of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, while being home to only 4.5 per cent of the world's population, but his remit is not to protect the environment, but the millions who would suffer as a direct result of environmental chaos. His job is protecting US interests all over the world, interests which are inseparable from profits.

Capitalist businesses survive by forcing out their competition, by cutting costs and sidestepping policies that hinder their expansion. They seek new outlets for their wares, to sell more and more, because this is the law of capitalism, and it is a law antagonistic to ecological concerns. It is the crazed law of capitalism that compels the big oil producers to pay teams of scientists to prepare reports that refute the findings of environmentalists who forewarn of the dire effects of current production methods.

The market economy demands that businesses only take into account their own narrow financial interests. Pleasing shareholders takes far more priority than ecological considerations. The upshot is that productive processes are distorted by this drive to make and accumulate profits. The result is an economic system governed by anarchic market forces which compel decision-makers, whatever their personal views or sentiments, to plunder, pollute and waste. They may well be loath to contaminate ecosystems, but the alternative is closure should they invest in costlier eco-friendlier production methods. Little wonder then that nature's balances are upset today, and that we face problems



such as melting glaciers, rising sea levels, acidic oceans and the like.

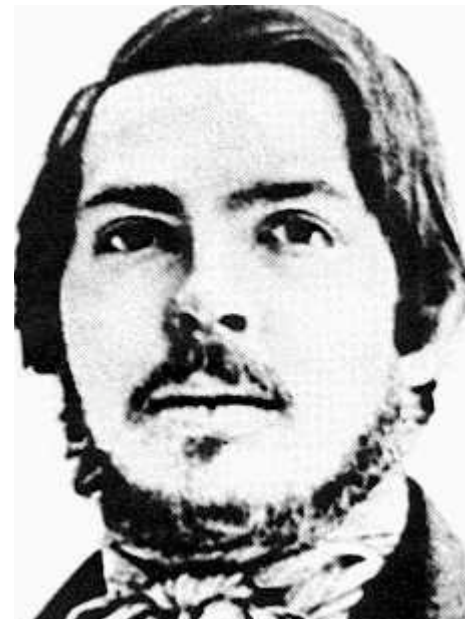
### All Greens now

The Greens have long insisted that things could be put right with a change of government policy, which is exactly what Labour now proposes. The problem, they believe, can be rectified by governments forcing through laws and imposing green taxes on air travel, motoring and high emission vehicles - to protect the environment. Even the Conservatives, with their new infantile eco-logo, and the Liberals have jumped on board the green bandwagon. Shadow chancellor George Osborne promises a whole swathe of green taxes. All are seemingly convinced the problem facing the environment is an economic one insofar as the world's governments can spend their way out of environmental catastrophe.

Governments, to be sure, exist to run the political side of the profit system and, no matter how well intentioned, do not have a free hand to do what is sensible or desirable. They do not control the market-driven profit system - it controls them and shapes their policies. Which government is going to tell its oil companies to produce less oil, when these same oil producers are under constant pressure to pump more out of the ground and as cheaply as possible? Within three years annual car sales are set to hit 60 million per year, 10 million up on 2004. Which government will dare threaten these car sales with its eco-policies? At the very best their eco-policies can only slow down the speed of environmental decay, not halt it in its tracks at some future date.

Socialists are no different from others in desiring an environment in which the safety of all animal and plant species is ensured. Where we differ from our political opponents is in recognising that their demands have to be set against a well-entrenched economic and social system, based on class privilege and property and governed by the overriding law of profits first.

It has long been our case that human needs can be satisfied without recourse to production methods that adversely effect the natural environment, which is exactly



*Facing page: former World Bank chief economist, Sir Nicholas Stern who, claims David Miliband (above left), put forward a 'challenging message.' Above: Frederick Engels, author of 'Dialectics of Nature'.*

why we advocate the establishment of a system of society in which production is freed from the artificial constraints of profit. We are not talking about nationalisation or any other tinkering with the present system, but rather its entire abolition and replacement with a global system in which the Earth's natural and industrial resources are commonly owned and democratically controlled; a society in which each production process takes into consideration not only human need but any likely effect upon the environment.

One does not need a mastery of Earth sciences to envisage types of farming that preserve and enhance the natural fertility of the soil, the systematic recycling of materials obtained from non-renewable energy sources while developing alternative sources that continually renew themselves (i.e. solar energy and wind power); industrial processes that avoid releasing poisonous chemicals or radioactivity into the biosphere; the manufacture of solid goods made to last, not planned to break down after a period of time.

Once the Earth's natural and industrial resources have been wrested from the master class and become the common heritage of all humanity, then production can be geared to meeting needs in an ecologically acceptable way, instead of making profits without consideration for the environment. This the only basis on which we can meet our needs whilst respecting the laws of nature and to at last begin to reverse the degradation of the environment caused by the profit system. The only effective strategy for achieving a free and democratic society and, moreover, one that is in harmony with nature, is to build up a movement which has the achievement of such a society as its objective. ■

**JOHN BISSETT**

# Whose thoughts are you thinking?

*Richard Dawkins, the biologist, has become something of a celebrity through his outspoken advocacy of atheism as in his new book "The God Delusion". But his approach to religion is still an idealist one.*

The Dawkins approach to the question of religion is, like religion itself, an idealist one: religion is false, rationally unsustainable; morally enfeebling and a basis for hatred and division. Presumably Dawkins sees the death or meaningful diminution of religion by means of secularist persuasion just as religion hopes to resist secularisation by



what it sees as ethical persuasion.

Dawkins looks into the biological evolution of *homo sapiens* for the origin and growth of the multiplicity of religious faiths. He is speculative rather than dogmatic on the issue but much more convincing when showing how the stringency of faith-based social morality has been softened over time by an intellectual response to the social development of society. He recognises this but, unlike Marx and Engels on the question of religion, simply reports it as a phenomenon under the label of moral Zeitgeist.

Unlike Dawkins, the pioneers of scientific socialism sought to show religion as a reflex of the social organisation of society. Marx, in the Introduction to his Critique of Hegel's of *Philosophy of Right*, wrote:

"This state, this society, produces religion, a *reversed world consciousness*, because they are a *reversed world*. Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritualistic *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction... The struggle against religion is therefore immediately the fight against the other world of which religion is the spiritual *aroma*. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the *opium* of the people." (original italics)

It wasn't simply a question of religion being false, or brutal or divisive; it was a weapon of the ruling class, a bulwark in the way of the emancipation of the working class, a hurdle to be overcome in the progress to socialism nor could it be overcome while the conditions that nourished it continued to exist. Thus, the socialist sees religion as an integral part of the class struggle while the secularist sees it



simply as a harmful, false premise on which to base a system of moral rectitude. As far as capitalism's subject class is concerned, whether those who govern it or those who exploit it reject or accept faith is irrelevant; the morality of capitalism is not governed either by humanistic or religious considerations but by the constraints and compulsions of the marketplace.

## Inculcating religion

Dawkins deals well, even poignantly, with the religious indoctrination of children pointing, for example, to the absurd practice of labelling young children with the faith identity of their parents or guardians. Even very young children, as young as three or four are referred to as, for example, 'Catholic', 'Protestant' or 'Muslim' children because society accepts the legitimacy of parents or guardians or clerics or teachers hijacking the innocence of children for the inculcation of beliefs more likely to be resisted if they were offered initially to an older person. Dawkins rightly calls it child abuse with ramifications sometimes even more devastating than the sexual abuse of children.

Obviously socialists agree that the indoctrination of children is a contemptible invasion of the rights of a child but, grave as it is, it is less socially heinous than the ruthless inculcation of the appalling precepts and values of capitalism -



accompanied usually by the notion of a ubiquitous Divine Policeman - to which both children and adults of all ages are remorselessly exposed.

## Science and the system

Indoctrination makes a nonsense of the claim that we live in a democracy. Democracy is about choice and choice is based on information and knowledge. But nowhere in the world of capitalism are the people offered the slightest hint that there could be a way of running our society that might free us from the appalling problems that are built-in, inevitable aspects of global capitalism. Instead we have intense conditioning and thought control to the extent were we look on the utterly absurd, like war and world hunger, as natural and as inevitable as the seasons.

Capitalism and its institutions rape our consciousness and rob us of the ability to think independently. Every situation must be reasoned within the paradigm of a world in which we are beholden to a class of owners not only for our daily bread but for every aspect of our life-functions from the cradle to the grave and unless our needs are consistent with the profit needs of the owning class they will not be met.

Richard Dawkins sings the praises of science and in a general sense socialists join in the chorus. But science, possibly more than most other disciplines, is a prisoner of capitalism. The scientists have to beg at the table of the system for funding to pursue their projects; their sponsors are usually largely mammoth capitalist enterprises bent on discerning means of further enriching their directors and shareholders or capitalist governments dedicated to the overall



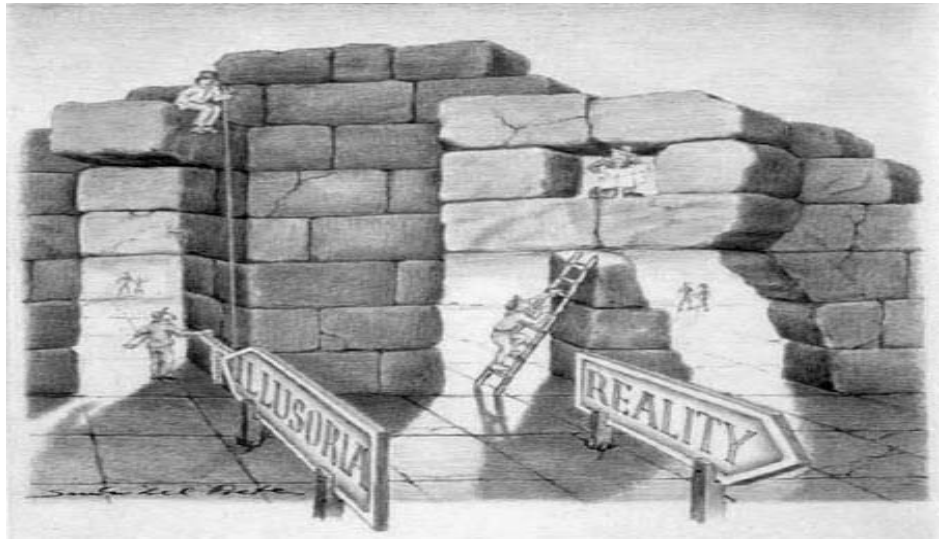


concerns of national capitalism.

Just like the rest of us, the scientist is a prisoner of the crazy logic of the system and just like the rest of us if his or her dedicated function does not hold promise of profit for those who directly or indirectly employ them, irrespective of the potential social benefits of their work, it will be denied funding.

The first phase in the struggle to end the political and economic exploitation of our class is to learn to question the thoughts we inherit from well-intentioned parents and teachers; to challenge the strictures of the priests, parsons, rabbis and mullahs and to question why in a world of potential abundance, where a parasite class of non-productive money shufflers and profit-takers are rich beyond measure, and the working class that produces all real wealth endure mere want or dire poverty. ■

**Richard Montague**



# Co-operation not Competition

**C**ompetition, we are told, is the lifeblood of capitalism. Firms compete with each other, thus leading to lower prices and technical innovation. In a monopoly situation, without competition, there would only be one seller, so



there would be no motivation to cut prices or introduce new products. But, so the theory says, competition keeps companies on their toes and guards against complacency and inefficiency. Firms that cannot compete go to the wall, but that does not matter, as these will necessarily be offering the wrong products or charging too-high

prices. Equally, competition for workers means that wages will increase, as firms will need to offer higher wages to keep their existing staff and hire new employees.

The idea of competition is drummed into us at school. From sports days to quizzes to exams, it's a matter of competing against others. Not just a question of doing your best but of doing better than other pupils do. It's all good for us, we're told, it gives us an incentive to improve and it fits us for the wider world of work.

So supporters of capitalism claim that competition is good for us as individuals and for society as a whole, but the question is - is this an accurate picture? does competitive capitalism really deliver the goods?

We can note firstly that even under capitalism competition is limited to fairly small areas of life. Most of the time we don't compete with other people; instead, we co-operate with them, working together to achieve our aims. So people may take it in turns to drive on a long car journey, may combine their efforts to tidy up a garden, may share out various household chores. Paid employment too would be impossible without co-operating with our fellow-workers. Whether in factory, office, shop or call-centre, most work nowadays is divided up so that any one worker only performs a small part of the whole productive process. This means that working with - not against - others is an essential aspect of work. If you're snowed under with work, you may well ask another employee to help you out. Outside employment, many people spend time working in trade unions, tenants' associations, choirs, sports clubs, and a myriad other organisations that work on the basis of voluntary co-operation. In a mining disaster, do rescuers compete to see who can save the most of those trapped? No - they all work together with a single

aim, that of saving as many people as possible.

Of course there is such a thing as piece work, and salespeople who compete to earn the biggest commission. But these still involve co-operation with others, and moreover they are often high-pressure jobs, where the worker is constantly urged to work harder and harder. In short, they're not much fun, and realising this is a key to realising what's wrong with competition.

Now, even supporters of the current system would probably accept that most of the time people work together in producing things. They might even say that this is part of the essence of capitalism: people voluntarily co-operating or entering into contracts with others (such as contracts to buy their goods or labour power). Yet competition, they would repeat, is necessary too, to boost performance and efficiency and to keep prices down.

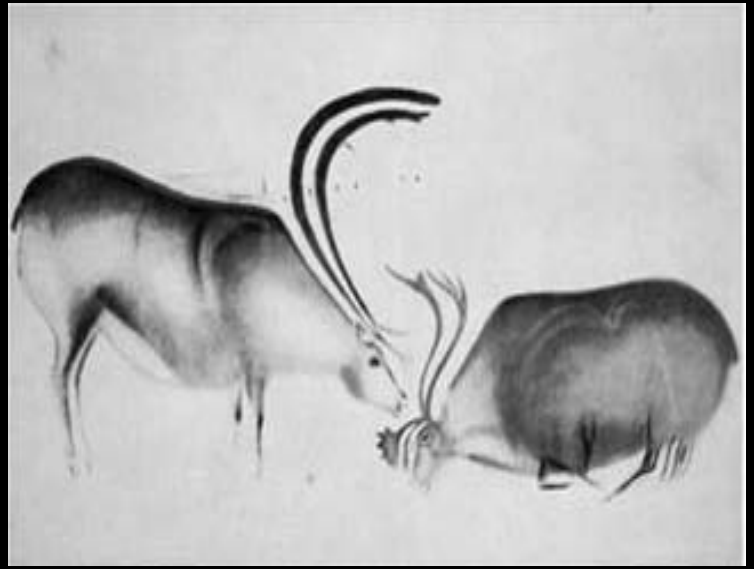
Look, though, at the bad sides of competition. For one thing, it involves workers competing with each other, trying to get a job and therefore deny the same job to someone else, or offering to do the job at a lower wage. And competition must involve winners and losers: many workers will lose out in the job market, having no job at all or one that in no way matches their abilities or aspirations.

Competition in production, too, involves not looking at producing the best or safest widget. Instead, it requires producing what can be sold at a profit, probably tailored to the wallets of the prospective buyers. It also involves looking over one's shoulder at one's competitors, to see what they are doing and try to put one over on them. Inevitably much research into improved products is duplicated by national or international rivals. Someone involved in competition can never stay still, never rest on their laurels; they must always be striving to stay in the race, at least keep up with the others.

And why should anyone have to compete with other people in order to live a decent life? Socialism implies a world based on co-operation, on people all pulling in the same direction. Nobody will be forced to be competitive, rather everyone will produce for human need without fear of being out-competed. Likewise the

establishment of Socialism requires co-operation, requires the world's working class to combine in a movement aimed at getting rid of the dog-eat-dog world of capitalism. ■  
**Paul Bennett**





# Driven from Eden?

## *Was the Neolithic Revolution entirely a good thing?*

Some 10,000 years ago - quite recently in the four million years of human evolution - communities began to rely less on hunting, fishing, and foraging for food and settled down to plant crops and rear livestock. This change, known as the Neolithic (New Stone Age) Revolution, opened the way to landed property, city life, patriarchy, slavery, imperial conquest, and all the other delights of "civilization" - that is, class society. It has generally been seen as a great step forward for humanity. This was the view was taken Marx, who believed that the development of class society would eventually lead to a return to communal life at a higher technological level.

And yet we inherit a myth that mourns the pre-Neolithic life as a paradise lost. The Bible tells us that God drove Adam from the Garden of Eden to till the accursed ground ("it shall bring forth thorns and thistles for you") and eat bread in the sweat of his face. As for Eve, she was to bear children in sorrow and be ruled over by her husband (*Genesis 3: 17--19, 23*). If only they had played their cards right!

So what was life really like for our prehistoric ancestors? There are two kinds of evidence. We can learn quite a lot about the material aspects of their existence -what they ate, what tools they used, how often they moved camp, how healthy they were - from the archeological record, although its interpretation is sometimes open to dispute. We can also use information collected in modern times about people still living by hunting and gathering, such as Australian aborigines and South African bushmen, making due allowance for change in environmental conditions. Thus, many contemporary Stone Age groups have been pushed out into "marginal" semi-desert environments. In prehistoric times people lived under a wide range of natural conditions, often much more favorable to human life than the Kalahari or the Australian outback.

Even in these marginal environments, however, surviving hunters and gatherers live quite an easy life, working on average just two to four hours a day. Many daylight hours are spent socializing, dancing or napping. (See Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, Tavistock Publications, 1974.) Their diet is adequate in quantity, varied,

and nutritious. For instance, the Kalahari bushmen eat over a hundred varieties of plant, including fruits, berries, nuts, gums, roots and bulbs, leafy greens, beans, and melons. Archeological evidence suggests that our Stone Age ancestors were also generally well fed and healthy. Late Paleolithic skeletons from Greece and Turkey show an average height of 5' 9" for men and 5' 5" for women, as compared to 5' 3" and 5' 0" for skeletons from a later agricultural period (3,000 BC).

At least until very recently, agriculture entailed considerably more work than hunting and gathering. Moreover, as God warned Adam, it was more exhausting work than the activities it replaced. Farmers have typically depended heavily on one or two species of grain or tuber (wheat, maize, rice, potatoes). If the crop failed they starved: recall the potato blight that caused the great Irish famine. As well as being less reliable, their food supply was poorer in nutritional quality, with more carbohydrates and less protein and vitamins.

In addition, agriculture was also bad for people's health. Dense settlement facilitated the transmission of disease and made it more difficult to dispose of human waste away from the living area. The clearing of woodland for farming created habitats for mosquitoes.

Why then did our ancestors give up their customary way of life and switch to agriculture? Mark Nathan Cohen (*The Food Crisis in Prehistory*, Yale University Press, 1977) argues that for a long time they knew how to plant, weed, and even irrigate crops, and, like many Amazonian groups today, did so selectively on a small scale. Not only did they hunt, fish and forage; they gardened too. But they chose not to farm until forced to do so by the gradually rising pressure of population on resources. For all



*Bushmen of the Kalahari*





its disadvantages, agriculture can yield more food per unit area, thereby supporting a denser population.

Indeed, who would voluntarily exchange the excitement of the hunt, the easygoing companionship of the foraging expedition, or the creative experimentation of rainforest gardening for the monotonous, backbreaking toil of tilling the soil?

The prehistoric development of gardening skills demonstrates that technological progress did occur in "primitive" communities and, moreover, that it tended to take more ecologically sustainable forms than it has in class society. Thus the transition to agriculture did not mark the beginning of technological progress.

Some have suggested that the Neolithic Revolution may have been socially regressive in yet another sense. Contemporary Stone Age groups are culturally open. Intermarriage is common across the boundaries not only of local bands but also of broader speech communities. Among bushmen, "individuals are free to move from group to group,

partake of local resources, and participate in whatever cooperative social efforts occur wherever they are" (Cohen, p. 62). The same will apply, we hope, in a future socialist society. In the view of many though not all prehistorians, the wide geographical distribution of identical sets of tools (e.g., the Acheulian tool complex) indicates a similar cultural openness in the Stone Age. Only in the period immediately preceding the shift to agriculture did Stone Age society fracture into closed "tribal" groups.



Neolithic reconstruction, County Tyrone

The argument, however, that the Neolithic Revolution and the class societies that emerged from it have been socially regressive in all respects cannot be sustained. Their cultural, scientific and technological achievements cannot be denied. But as we contemplate the last few millennia, full of suffering, futility, and moral and ecological degradation, we may well wonder whether the losses outweigh the gains.

Will the establishment of socialism justify in retrospect the painful path that led to it? Socialism, unfortunately, is a much more uncertain prospect than Marx assumed. If we don't awake in time from the nightmare of class society, the Neolithic Revolution will have to be regarded as the crucial event that triggered the fatal degeneration of our species and the final devastation of our planet. After all, in the Stone Age we already had socialism, even though it was at a fairly low technological level.

To save the species and the planet, what we need is a return to the communal life of those days but at a higher technological level. ■

Stefan

Agriculture - backbreaking



## Cooking the Books (1)

### Stating the obvious

Edmund Phelps won the 2006 Nobel prize for economics for research into the interplay between prices, unemployment and inflation expectations. A press release gave the reasons:

"Phelps suggested that in setting prices and negotiating wages, employers and workers make judgements about future inflation that in turn influence the inflation outcome. As a consequence, the long-run rate of unemployment

is not affected by inflation but only determined by the functioning of the labour market. The academy said the theoretical framework Phelps developed in the late 1960s helped economists understand the causes of soaring prices and unemployment in the 1970s. Phelps's work has fundamentally altered our views on how the macroeconomy operates."

([http://money.cnn.com/2006/10/09/news/newsmakers/phelps\\_nobel\\_reut/index.htm](http://money.cnn.com/2006/10/09/news/newsmakers/phelps_nobel_reut/index.htm))

Phelps's explanation for inflation amounts to the circular argument that rising prices cause rising prices. This doesn't really explain anything about contemporary capitalism and it doesn't explain those periods of capitalist history when the general price level (including the price known as a wage or salary) was stable or falling.

The real explanation is to be found outside the circle of rising

prices, in the government issuing more currency than is needed for economic transactions to take place. Whenever and wherever currency inflation has taken place, rising prices have been the result. It is of course true that once the psychology of inflationary expectations is established, employers and unions will want to take into account future inflation rates when determining wage levels. But the real underlying explanation (currency inflation) is radically different from Phelps's superficial view that rising prices cause rising prices.

Up to the 1970s the ruling theory in economics was the Phillips Curve. This basically said that there was a trade-off between inflation and unemployment: we could have higher inflation and lower unemployment or lower inflation and higher unemployment. Until the 1970s, that is, when we had both rising inflation and rising unemployment. That discredited the Phillips Curve. But what would economists tell the ruling class now? According to Phelps, the message is: "unemployment is not affected by inflation." Brilliant! Give that man a Nobel prize! But even this isn't quite right, since it is possible for inflation to get seriously out of control, causing economic dislocation and rising unemployment as in Weimar Germany in the 1920s.

Phelps is right to say that the long-run rate of unemployment is determined by the functioning of the labour market. But this is something we have said for many years - well before Phelps. Can we have our Nobel prize now?



# Parting with Leninism



*Extracts from an email received from a reader who has recently broken with a Leninist organisation, the New Communist Party (publishers of the 'New Worker')*

"Act in haste and repent at leisure." So runs the old adage and it is true for me, at least in respect of my joining the *New Worker* readers' group. Actually, I was debating whether or not to continue my subscription at all and when I finally decided to do so I thought it might be best to become more actively involved. However, the more I read the more aware I became of too much that is indefensible.

By no means does this apply to everything. Indeed, Ray Jones' article, "*What have communists got against capitalism*", was a clear and succinct summary of Marxism by which the case was well stated. I could hardly disagree with it and shall keep it for reference purposes. It is with the espousal of certain causes I must firstly take issue. Jones

lists a number of immediate causes to be pursued: "... better wages and conditions, better education, better health services, better housing, a better environment, against war, against authoritarianism and injustice and for more democracy (workers' power), and against racism, sexism and homophobia, which can divide workers ..."

Which brings me to the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea, i.e. North Korea] where some of these things may have been achieved, at least in part, but many are non-existent. Including the word "Democratic" in the state's title does not mean that state is so. In what meaningful sense can the word democratic be applied to North Korea? How can a party, the NCP, proclaim opposition to authoritarianism



**North Korean soldiers, not keen on democracy, but they like marching ...**

and yet ally itself with one of the most authoritarian states in the world, not forgetting Vietnam, another country in which the popular will finds no real expression? I'm sure there are all manner state bodies supposedly dedicated to demotic purposes, but the Dear Leader and his beribboned and medal-festooned generals seem unconcerned with any such institutions.

The use of the word "progressive" in the *New Worker* appears to be as part of an oxymoron as in, "progressive governments like those of Iraq (pre-invasion) and Syria" (Editorial, 20 October) As these two administrations were largely secular in the context of the Middle East, women did indeed achieve a measure of emancipation denied in more Islamic states. But this was within authoritarian states in which opposition was (is) ruthlessly suppressed and the use of torture commonplace. Both these states had (and probably have) imperialist ambitions of their own. Not on the scale of the USA, admittedly, nor do they have the military where with all, but that does not prevent them being aggressive states. To use the word progressive in relation to Baathist parties is to deprive it of any meaning or worse. Like Alice's Humpty Dumpty, it

means whatever you want it to mean. How can it be that communists are prepared to give support to some of the most reactionary regimes and movements in the world?

The same editorial ran, "The Muslim community is under attack because it is almost entirely opposed to Anglo-American imperialism's 'war against terror' which is no more than a war against Muslims." Capitalism, and therefore Imperialism, does not give a damn for religion, for any race or creed. Profit alone is its motivation and that, in a competitive world, means geo-political control over markets and resources. Of course it will use differences between people, race, religion, football (useful worldwide to reinforce national allegiances), to divide and weaken potential opposition. This can be clearly seen in Iraq at the moment, where there is a far greater toll of the indigenous population due to inter-Muslim strife than is presently due to coalition military action. In fact, one group of Muslims, the Sufis who were viciously persecuted by Saddam Hussein's "progressive" regime, were freed from their terrible incarceration following the fall of the Baathists.

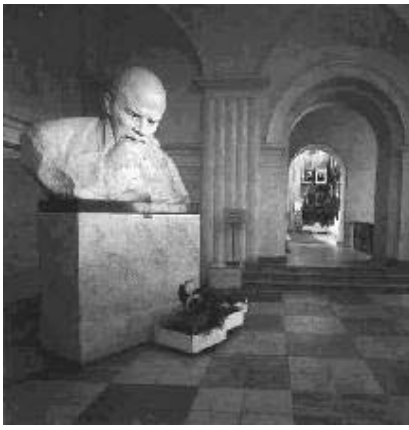
Having read the above the obvious questions are, why did I renew my subscription to the *New Worker* and why did I join



the reader's group? Having posed them both to myself I conclude that I was trying to hang on to something that has been a significant part of my adult life. Even since I first became involved in politics in my later teens I have been ideologically torn between two quite incompatible understandings of Marxism, the Leninist model and the very much more libertarian approach of the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

The attraction of the Leninist model is that it offers the seeming possibility of immediate action and demands with the ultimate goal, Communism, in mind. But, however laudable they may be reforms become the political objective in themselves, they





are the reason the Trade Unions established the Labour Party. They are not and cannot be stepping-stones to the revolution. A revolution to vanquish capitalism and establish socialism can only happen through the active agency of the working class; it cannot be carried out by a vanguard party on its behalf. This is the Leninist fallacy, for if the working class is so motivated it does not require some pre-existing party to act as its surrogate. If a need for a disciplined vanguard party exists then the working class is not ready to seize the moment, the vast majority are still integrated into the capitalist ideological mindset. Then, should the vanguard party take power it inevitably ends up ruling a reluctant working class, the dictatorship over (not of) the proletariat, no matter that the members of that party are dedicated and sincere. Then the supposed final goal becomes enabler of tragedy.

For years I've intellectually, and arrogantly, justified the actions of Stalin, Mao Zedong, Enver Hoxha and their ilk in terms of their life and death struggle for socialism with capitalist encirclement and intrigue. I have argued that the crimes laid at their door were largely trumped up and exaggerated or caused by a reaction to imperialist pressure. I have been little more than a left wing David Irving,

doing injury to history, denying the victims, for the cause. A cause that was always doomed to fail when Lenin found himself master of a largely war broken peasant country which led him to establish a state that would become ever more entrenched rather than wither away. Trotsky would have made no difference had he assumed control after Lenin's death as he was of the same authoritarian ilk. The state capitalism that subsequently developed did serve the historical purpose of sweeping away feudalism in Russia and developed a working class that can now play its part in choosing socialism. As is the way with all forms of capitalism, state as well as free market, this was achieved at a dreadful cost paid by the workers.

Frustrating though it undoubtedly is, there can be no short cut to socialism. Either the vast majority decide to embrace it or it does not occur. Socialism is not inevitable, the conditions are ripe for it, but if workers the world over fail to implement it, then there is also the possibility of barbarism. Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans, all serving as paradigms of one dreadful possible future. Promoting the socialist cause is undoubtedly hampered by its association with totalitarian regimes both past and present or with the reformism of Labour, a seeming easier option of socialism without much of an effort, that has undoubtedly brought benefits only for them to be whittled away in the interests of profit.

Our world is faced by major threats from war and environmental disaster, both fuelled by the insatiable appetite capitalism has. There is a desperate need for socialism, but it's not to be found behind the barbed wire in North Korea. It is incumbent on all who award themselves the epithet communist to place their hands on their hearts and say, to themselves as much as to anyone else, whether they really see a future for humanity in such a place.



## Poor woman's banker



### Cooking the Books (2)

This year's Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to Muhammad Yunus, an economics lecturer and banker from Bangladesh. The spread of "micro-banking", which he thought up and put into practice, was judged to have contributed to world peace.

Leaving aside whether he should have got the Economics rather than the Peace prize, what is micro-banking? Actually, it is not all that different from ordinary banking in that it is still based on a bank lending out money that has been previously deposited with it. The difference lies in who the money is lent to. The Grameen bank, which Yunus set up in 1976, lends to poor self-employed people.

The established banks in Bangladesh had shunned such people because, being so poor, they had nothing to offer as collateral for any loan and so were not considered credit-worthy. In order to start up or keep themselves in activity, poor self-employed people had to resort to local money-lenders who charged usurious rates of interest. A typical example would be the woman in the story about how bank got set up:

"In the village of Jobra, Dr Yunus met a woman who made bamboo stools. Because she had no assets and was unable to borrow from conventional sources, she had to resort to the money lenders. For each stool, she borrowed the equivalent of 15p to buy the raw bamboo. After repaying at extortionate rates of interest she made barely 1p on each stool. This woman was hard-working and talented but was being held back by a lack of access to finance. Inspired by her story, Dr Yunus started a series of experiments and lent tiny sums of his own money to villagers. They used the money to set up small businesses such as basket weaving and raising chickens. He found that his borrowers - mainly women - repaid in full and on time" (*Times*, 1 September).

What Yunus had shown was that the poor self-employed can be credit-worthy. Banks based on his principles lend out very small sums for a year which have to be repaid, with interest (at just above the ordinary banks' rate), from current sales. While a means of freeing the self-employed in countries like Bangla Desh from the clutches of the money-lenders, micro-banking is not a solution to global poverty. Not only because not everybody in such countries could become a basket weaver or a chicken farmer or a maker of bamboo stools, but because those the bank lends to remain poor and dependant on the vagaries of the market.

Nor is there anything anti-capitalist about the scheme. *The Times* described Yunus in an editorial (14 October) as "the Adam Smith of the Poor" and their correspondent in Dhaka reported:

"Professor Yunus insisted that he was not against the free market, but that he wanted the market to be free for everyone. 'I am a free-market guy and even the poor should be part of the free market', he said. 'Two thirds of the population of the world are not able to participate, so it is not free'".

The way the Grameen bank works also confirms the Marxian view that banks cannot create credit out of nothing. Like other banks it can only lend what has been deposited with it. If certain banking theories were correct - that if you deposit £1 in a bank, it can then lend out £9 rather than only 90p - then Professor Yunus would have been able to help the poor self-employed of Bangladesh by a mere stroke of the pen. But if he had tried to run his bank on this theory it would have rapidly gone bankrupt, and the only prize he would have got would have been a booby prize for either stupidity or naivety.

Political drama

Pieter Lawrence: *The Last Conflict*  
 Booksurge, 2006, £10

One of the more pleasing aspects of the last couple of decades of socialist activity has been the proliferation of books written by socialists, previously quite a rare phenomenon. Almost all of these books have been non-fiction, either putting the case for socialism directly or else discussing the socialist movement itself. This book, by long-standing Socialist Party member Pieter Lawrence, is somewhat different. It is a work of fiction - and an interesting one too, in that while it is a gripping political novel set in Britain it doesn't mention any political parties, and introduces the idea of socialism without ever explicitly identifying it as such.

Without giving too much away to future readers, it is about how a British government beset by economic difficulties and strikes handles a political crisis of a different sort - emerging news of a large comet that is heading towards Earth. Over time, it appears that if the Earth will not be directly hit by the comet, it will pass by closely enough to cause a missile bombardment from space. Fragments of rock would be detached by the comet hurtling through the Earth's atmosphere in the type of future scenario envisaged by some current astronomers, and often argued to be the real cause of the disappearance of the dinosaurs from Earth tens of millions of years ago.

The novel focuses on the attempts by the government to cover-up news of the impending disaster and then, when mass public panic and disorder arises, to initiate a massive programme of civil defence involving the creation of deep shelters for the population, including the conversion of the London underground system.

Much of the action revolves around some of the main characters in the government and their thinking about how to handle the emerging crisis. As well as maintaining social control, not the least of their problems is a financial one. At a time when the government is already under severe financial pressure, the paid construction of a huge network of deep shelters across the country would be ruinous and logistically impossible. The government's solution is to turn to voluntary labour, of the sort that had emerged during the economic crisis and strike wave when people had been encouraged by the government to volunteer to keep the hospitals and other essential services going. It soon emerges, however, that this sort of piecemeal voluntary labour is not enough, as materials need to be purchased and production facilities harnessed quickly and on a mammoth scale if the civil defences are to be constructed in time. So voluntary labour is generalised and supplemented by a credit note system and the requisitioning of factories, building materials, land and so on.

Such is the scale of the task however, that the majority of the population becomes involved and the credit note system - initially designed as a temporary measure - becomes meaningless as the government would never be able to pay back the massive credits owed to the working population and owners of capital when life returned to capitalist 'normality'. The only solution is for the government - after much internal discussion

and dissension - to decree a temporary cashless economy while the civil defences are built. There is a suspension of all paid economic activity and bank accounts, etc are frozen, with the population being able to directly access the goods and services produced by voluntary labour, assisted by a Second World War-type rationing system for some products. All of this occurs alongside massive campaigns and mobilisations from the general population desperate that nothing (whether shortage of resources or government reticence) should halt the vital work of civil defence, a programme which literally appears to be the only chance of human survival.

In this way, the novel cleverly introduces the idea of a society based on voluntary labour without wages, money and prices as the only way in which society as a whole can pull together sufficiently to direct the largest construction programme in the history of the planet, drawing on the type of 'wartime spirit' previously evident during the Blitz. To what extent this programme is successful, and for what happens when the comet finally passes by, you will need to read the book.

As a novel, the narrative is well-written and fast-paced. Indeed, even if you are not a socialist it is an exceptionally good read and this is one of its strengths. It has been written with a view to introducing the idea of a socialist society to people without the usual terminology (or, in fact, much political jargon as a whole) so that the idea slowly creeps up on the reader as they progress through the book. The characterisations are strong and believable, and help to anchor the story as one about humanity and people's very fight for survival. In this respect it is compelling and, at times, gripping too.

The artistic licence of the fiction writer is called on only minimally, mainly perhaps with the somewhat UK-centred plotline to what is, by definition, a world phenomenon and crisis. Also, the work gives small and almost subliminal hints that it was written some time ago as in some respects the general political 'feel' is of Britain in the 1970s, before the internet and satellite TV, and in an era when Prime Ministers still made broadcasts to the nation pipe in hand. Indeed, whether some of the communication blackouts imposed by the government at various times in the story are achievable in today's e-society is a moot point, though again this doesn't seem to be a huge issue for the purposes of the plot and its underlying message.

The storyline of *The Last Conflict* is so cleverly woven, with the plot developing in clear stages, and the characterisation is so strong, that this is a work that would lend itself to other genres quite easily. At present, the physical binding of the book by the current publishers could be better and nothing would be more fitting for the book's wider popularisation than if a TV dramatisation of the novel was what made it known to a mass audience. To this end, it is to be hoped that the book will find itself in the hands of someone with the opportunity and vision to put this into effect, because it could without doubt, and without a hint of exaggeration, make for one of the best political dramas ever shown on British television.

DAP

Early days of globalisation

Nick Robins: *The Corporation that Changed the World: How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational*. Pluto Press, £15.99

I often gauge how much I have enjoyed a book by the amount of highlighting and marginal notes I make in pencil. This book, like many on my shelves, will horrify those who prize pristine, unmarked first editions.

On 31 December 1600 a precursor of the modern transnational corporation came into existence. Its pioneering techniques in the field of trade and commerce, and downright murder and corruption, preceded by centuries the noxious business practices that we associate with today's all-powerful corporations, many of whom have a higher turn over than small countries.

This book presents as a meticulous account of perhaps the most powerful corporation that ever lived, tracing how it came into existence, how it operated, its inner structure, the role of its own armies in its rise to supremacy, its part in the Bengal Famine when 10 million died as a result of the Company's market manipulation, its militaristic role in the Opium Wars, its part in the Indian Mutiny and the Boston Tea Party and how, for the last twenty years of its existence, it ruled India as an agent of the British Empire. When it comes to downright exploitation, corruption, slaughter and sheer negligence and indifference to the suffering of others, perhaps no company that ever existed comes near the East India Company in its ruthless pursuit of profit, whilst refashioning the world commercial order in the interests of privilege and power for hundreds of years to come.

In its time the company had many critics, most notably Edmund Burke, "the real champion of India's identity", Adam Smith and Karl Marx. Burke fought long and hard to impeach the Company's Governor General Warren Hastings for the devastation wrought on India in its endless search for profit.

Commencing his opening speech at Westminster Hall in February 1788, Burke said:

"I impeach him in the name of the people of India, whose laws, rights and liberties, he has subverted, whose properties he has destroyed, whose country he has laid waste and desolate . . . I impeach him in the name of human nature itself, which he has cruelly outraged, injured and oppressed, in both sexes, in very age, rank, situation and conditions of life."

Despite Burke's opening four day tirade against Hastings - one of the longest opening speeches in history - during which women were carried out fainting, at which the Speaker was "rendered speechless" and at which spectators were willing to pay £50 for a seat, despite an ensuing trial that lasted from February 1787 to April 1795, Hastings was acquitted.

Considering the Company's operations for the *New York Daily Tribune* in the summer of 1853, Marx noted five characteristics: ". . . a permanent financial deficit, a regular over-supply of wars, and no supply at all of public works, an abominable system of taxation, and a no less abominable system, of justice and law.."

Satirising the Company's administrative system, he commented how



there existed "no government by which so much is written and so little done." Marx furthermore viewed the company as a tool of British capitalism plc in India, observing how "the aristocracy wanted to conquer it, the moneyocracy wanted to plunder it and the millocracy to undersell it".

The Second Opium War was, in Marx's view, attributable to the Company's operations in the East and its insistence that it had the right to swamp China with drugs in the name of profit, regardless of the addiction-induced misery its trade created or how the Chinese authorities felt. He wrote:

"While openly preaching free trade in poison, it secretly defends the monopoly of its manufacture. Whenever we look closely into the nature of British free trade, monopoly is pretty generally found to, lie at the bottom of its freedom".

In eight carefully researched chapters, Robins traces the Company's operations from its inception as a trader in spices to its role in running the Indian sub-continent on behalf of the British crown, withholding, one imagines, very little regardless how gruesome, and there indeed are some stomach-churning passages.

In the final chapter, his analysis masterly done, Robins, contemplating the state of corporate play today, reflects how the Company's legacy reveals the importance of taking on the mega-corporations who presently rampage across the planet unhindered, and this, for socialists, is the book's one failing.

Robins' remedy for curbing corporate power is simple:

"First of all, its market power and political influence must be limited . . . Next, stringent rules are needed to ensure that management and investors do not use the corporation as a tool for their short-term interests . . . And, finally, clear and forcible systems of justice have to be in place to hold the corporation to account for damage to society and the environment."

Thus, a brilliant attack on unchecked power in the pursuit of profit is marred by the simple request that the capitalist class behaves and shows a little more respect when carrying out its obscene business, and that the executive arm of capitalism - government - hurries to the rescue of society and the natural environment. Smiley-faced capitalism is, for Robins, the only remedy. Warren Hastings laughs in his grave.

All said, if you're into the study of corporate power gone mad, read this.

**John Bissett**

## Not socialism

**Randhir Singh: *Crisis of Socialism*. Amit Atwal. 2006. 1087 pages. £29.99.**

In Europe most Leninists are probably Trotskyists. In Asia they would seem to be Maoists. Randhir Singh falls into this category, arguing that although Stalin made mistakes and what he called socialism wasn't socialism, Russia finally became a fully-fledged new class society ruled by a state bourgeoisie only in 1964, when Brezhnev took over from Khrushchev. Russia went capitalist in 1991. Since then China has gone that way too. Only Cuba and North Korea have not yet gone capitalist, and only Cuba is on the road to socialism.

## ***An Inconvenient Truth* (2005), directed by Davis Guggenheim**

This film is advertised as 'a passionate and inspirational look at one man's commitment to expose the myths and misconceptions that surround global warming and inspire actions to prevent it'. That one man is Al Gore: company director, author and professional politician for the Democratic Party of the USA. Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that a substantial portion of this so-called documentary feels more like a political broadcast. The film is based on footage of a lecture on climate change given to a sympathetic audience, interspersed with short asides on Gore's career as a professional politician, his privileged upbringing, his personal life and accounts of him driving and flying around the world to lecture on the effects of fossil fuel usage.

Gore presents quantitative and anecdotal evidence for climate change in an easily digestible way. Some time is spent on the history and methodology of atmospheric carbon dioxide and temperature measurements. The data is clearly presented in graphs, diagrams and photographs but Gore doesn't distinguish between measurements and extrapolations. Some of the graphs are presented in a way that magnifies small differences in data, and effects of climate change that are speculations are presented as inevitable with no reference to the likelihood of their occurrence or other theories.

At one point Gore seems to be arguing that Ice Ages are caused solely by declining greenhouse gases; he says 'when there is more carbon dioxide the temperature gets warmer'. He does not point out that among the theories for the causes of Ice Ages changes to the composition of the atmosphere are seen as just one component, or even as a result of the Ice Age not a cause itself.

As the film progresses Gore increasingly overstates the effects, or evidence for the effects, of climate change. Species loss, re-emergence of suppressed diseases and the emergence of new diseases such as SARS are all implied to be a result of climate change without evidence. The importance of the climate change issue does not need to be exaggerated.

In an aside, Gore reflects on his time in Congress promoting action on climate change, he laments: 'the struggles, the victories that aren't really victories, the defeats that aren't really defeats, they can serve to magnify the significance of some trivial step forward'. He blames the present administration of the state and their links with the oil and gas lobby. For Socialists it is obvious that the government will rarely go against the interests of capital, especially a section of the capitalist class as powerful as the energy industry.

Gore states that climate change 'is really not a political issue so much as a moral issue'. His remedy for the problem is to advise people to exercise their power as

That's what this book argues but we doubt that many people will have the patience to read through 1000 pages portraying Lenin, as like Marx, an advocate of the democratic self-emancipation of the working class, interspersed with favourable comments on Mao and Stalin.

**ALB**

consumers in choosing energy efficient appliances and cars and use 'our political processes, in our democracy', and he just happens to be a professional politician concerned about climate change. He states it is a false dichotomy to say that the choice is economy or the environment, we can have both: 'If we do the right thing, then we're going to create a lot of wealth and we're going to create a lot of jobs . . .'. The details of this were left sketchy but it seems that hope triumphs over experience and he still has faith in capitalism.

In conclusion Gore states, to rapturous applause, that 'We have everything we need save perhaps political will . . . We have the ability to do this . . . The solutions are in our hands'. He is correct, but for him this means more of the same old futile politicking. Socialists realise that profit will always be the priority for capitalism, the solution in our hands is to bring the means of production under direct democratic control so that everybody can take part in deciding how global resources are used.

This documentary film follows a novel format and is visually impressive. It is a good introduction to the basics of human-made climate change problem, but is tarnished by the lack of convincing solutions.

**PDH**

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## Obituaries

### LEN FEINZING

Len Feinzing (also known in the party as Lenny Fenton) died in October. Born in 1917, he joined the World Socialist Party of the US in 1936 and was an active member of Boston Local until there was no more local to be active in. He was part of the core group who continued monthly meetings to mail out the *Socialist Standards* and keep the bare bones of a socialist movement alive during the 1980s. After the renaissance that the WSP began to experience in 1987, he continued to take part in every activity except those requiring computer skills. Lenny's greatest contribution to the organization was as a speaker, both on the soapbox and indoors. He was arguably the best debater in the WSP, frequently impressing large audiences in debates with groups from Harvard, MIT and Brandies. He also spoke on Local Boston's radio program during the late 1960s and early 70s. He visited Britain on a number of occasions, the last time being 2003. Comrade Feinzing

served for many years on both the NAC and the Editorial Committee of the *Western Socialist*, the journal of the American and Canadian parties. He also made it his personal project to increase the circulation of the *Western Socialist* dramatically during the 1950s (not at all an easy task in that period of history!) by instituting a successful nationwide Library Campaign. His life was long and productive. He will be long remembered.

### BILL ROSS

Glasgow branch are sad to report the death of our comrade Bill Ross. Bill came across the Socialist Party at an outdoor meeting at the Mound in Edinburgh in the summer of 1965. Within months he had joined Glasgow branch. He was a larger than life figure who had left school at 15 years of age and had been a merchant seaman for many years. When he came in contact with the party he had graduated from Drama College and was already appearing on stage at the Edinburgh Festival. Within a short time Bill was himself speaking for the party both indoors and

outdoors including a spell in London when he was working there. Later on when he found the stage too precarious an occupation he worked for many years for the Glasgow Parks Department where he was very active in trade union affairs. Bill was a voracious reader and was especially interested in scientific subjects. He was a good example of the self-taught worker, although having had a very basic academic career he had a wide knowledge of astro-physics and evolution, often giving branch talks on such subjects. He was a warm, friendly human being with a good sense of humour and his speciality was in taking popular songs and re-writing parodies. Thus *The Lady is a Tramp* became *That's Why the Worker is a Slave* and the words of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* became - "Have you heard of the SPGB. We want a world without poverty. Well, did you ever. What a swell party this is." This is a sad time for all his Glasgow comrades but especially so for his wife and beloved comrade Terry. He will be greatly missed.

RD

## Hungary and Suez - Hope Amidst Tragedy



The governments of Israel, Britain, France and Russia, when they resorted to war in October 1956 in pursuit of their own separate objectives, have at the same time struck a decisive blow to achieve something they never sought and are hardly aware of. Their tanks and bombers in a few days of destruction have helped to shatter the most hampering illusion of our generation, an illusion that has held back multitudes from taking the first step towards a real understanding of the problems facing the human race.

This illusion was the belief, held with equal fervour by democrats and Communists, and on both sides of the Iron Curtain, that there are "two worlds," essentially different in arms and conduct.

On the one side the democrats and Labourites of the Western world believed that they and their rulers are guided by a superior moral code, are inherently against brutality, are committed to "law not war," and to United Nations, are incapable of naked aggression to further their interests.

On the other side were the Communists and their followers, who believed with equal sincerity

that Russia, by virtue of being a "Socialist" country, is free from and superior to the sordid imperialism and colonialism of the West, and utterly incapable of opposing the aspirations of ordinary workers.

Now the foundations of both beliefs have been smashed into fragments. Sincere men and women in both camps are horrified and heartbroken to discover in one revealing flash that the men they revered and the men they reviled behave in exactly the same criminal way; that the Edens and the Khrushchevs are blood brothers after all, worshippers of the same capitalist god of violence and war. The sickening dismay of those who trusted Eden, "the friend of United Nations," is only equalled by that of Communists who see Russian tanks smashing down Hungarian workers. For both groups the one thing that could not happen has happened.

(From front page article by 'H.', *Socialist Standard*, December 1956)

## 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.





# The Queen speaks - sort of

*Through an amazing, not to say unique, set of circumstances, Greasy Pole has come into possession of an early draft of the Queen's Speech to the nation on Christmas Day. As usual, the speech makes an impressive human document, covering a wide range of vital issues with the customary insight, compassion and courage. However readers must bear in mind that this is the first draft of the speech; when the broadcast takes place it may turn out that some changes have been made.*

## Tradition

Speaking to you this Christmas Day, I am humbly aware that I am carrying on a tradition begun by my grandfather and carried on by my father. We are all agreed that tradition plays a vital part in our lives - we all find comfort and security in the confidence that things will stay as they are even if it would be much better to change them. Of course as the Queen I am more in favour of this than most people - after all it is tradition that is often used as a clinching argument for keeping me and my family where we are. For so many of you, my viewers, it would not come amiss if you had less regard for tradition and more for thinking about re-organising society. But we won't go into that right now.

To begin, let us look at what my government have been doing and what they intend to do between now and next December 25. (You must not be misled by the words "my government", into thinking that I tell Tony Blair and the rest what to do. The opposite is true; that is why I am speaking to you today). My government continue to fight wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which seem to have no end in sight. You may recall that Mr. Blair and the other leaders assured us that Iraq would be a quick, clean business and not another Vietnam. They did not remind us then that the late President Johnson had promised the American people that Vietnam would not be another Korea. What future war, we may ask, will be justified on the grounds that it will not be another Iraq? And how many will be killed while this is going on?

## Rebuild

This is not say that it has been all bad news from Iraq. If we can forget the soldiers who have been killed and their grieving families and the tens of thousands Iraqi corpses which testify to the murderous efficacy, if not the unflinching accuracy, of American and British weaponry, there is another side to the story. Bechtel, a big and powerful American engineering company, has just finished a contract to repair the water, power and sewage system in Iraq, supposedly to the benefit of the people there. For this Bechtel were paid \$2.3 billion by the American government. And what has been the result? Well 52 Bechtel employees were killed during the work. Anything else? The electricity comes on for only a few hours a day, for much of the people there is no clean water supply and the sewage is largely untreated. In a recent issue of the *New York Times* a professor of economics wrote that "By any material measure, Iraqis are worse off than they were under Saddam".

Crime is another matter which my government are vigorously tackling. Theft may be all very well if it is the kind which allows one class to have access to most of the wealth but not when someone tries to help themselves outside the law. Violence is admirable when it is the clean, clinical type guided out of the skies of Iraq by trained people in uniforms but it is unacceptable when it is a few rowdies on the street after closing time. So Mr. Blair's ministers are cracking down on it; they are planning to bring in more laws which will enable courts to pass longer sentences on offenders. This will almost certainly mean more people being sent to prison and I confess I am a little puzzled by this; the government wants tougher sentences because of the high re-conviction rate for released prisoners and it seems rather odd that in these circumstances there should be plans to imprison more people.

## Farepak

We can all remember Mr. Blair's fine speech when he declared his intention of being "tough on the causes of crime" - meaning a crack down on problems like poverty in families, which is a standing incentive to people to take what they see as the short cut of crime to alleviate the pressures they are under. As part of this crackdown the government set up the Sure Start scheme, heralded by Mr. Blair as "...an idea (that) would lift all the boats on a rising tide". But now he has had to admit that It has not worked like that; he now says that "...Their problems are so multiple...these families then end up having five or six organisations dealing with them, but no one is actually dealing with them. If we are to change that we need a different way for government to operate". (Of course he did not really mean that last bit - governments "operate" as needed by this social system, with its poverty and doomed schemes like Sure Start).

An example of this was the collapse of the company Farepak. Now I don't need to have anything to do with Farepak because it was a firm which promised to help people with very little money to save up, a little at a time, for Christmas so that they could afford the turkey and the drink and food and the presents for the kids. It is not clear how many people were impressed by this idea; one estimate is that about 150,000 families were involved - another estimate is that their "savings" amounted to about £41 million. And all this was in the expectation that come Christmas they would get a nice hamper or some high street vouchers. Except that, like Sure Start, it did not work like that because Farepak's parent company - European Home Retail (EHR) - was in trouble over their overdraft with Halifax Bank of Scotland. When it turned out that EHR was using the savers' money to pay off their bank loan Farepak collapsed, leaving those hopeful families facing a very bleak Christmas.

HBOS blamed EHR for failing to have a "viable solution" to Farepak's problems. The chairman of EHR, Clive Thompson, retaliated that Farepak had been "hung out to dry" by the bank.

## Merry Christmas

But the spirit of Christmas, which I am recommending to you today as the way out of the world's problems, is not entirely dead. Clive Thompson unburdened himself on BBC Radio, saying "I feel very deeply for all those people who have been hurt by the collapse, in particular those who saved for Christmas - which has been ruined". These charitable words were offered by someone who is a past president of the Confederation of British Industry and who has sat on the boards of six FTSE companies. Not to be outdone, the managing director of Farepak, Gilodi-Johnson weighed in: "I am really gutted that everybody has lost out like this". Well yes.

So there it is, this Christmas 2006. While one class in society enjoys a securely affluent life style the other endures the kind of poverty which sometimes requires them to put together scraps of money in order to survive a paltry holiday. Huge corporations make massive profits from war and the ensuing social strife. All of this at a time when we are told that this is a season of peace and goodwill. It suits me and the class I represent, to believe that. But you?

Merry Christmas. ■

Suckers.

IVAN

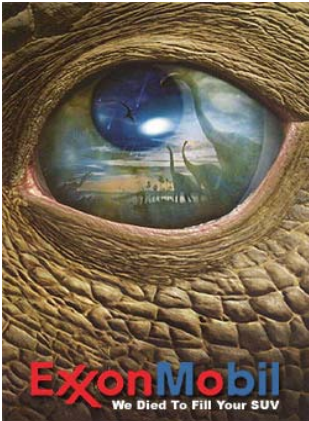




# Voice from the Back

## Profits And Oily Words

You have seen advertisements by oil companies that express concern for the environment and claim they fight global warming. It is of course a fraud. "Britain's leading scientists have challenged the US oil company ExxonMobil to stop funding groups that attempt to undermine the scientific consensus on climate change. In an unprecedented step, the Royal Society, Britain premier scientific academy, has written to the oil giant to demand that the company withdraws support for dozens of groups that have "misrepresented the



science of climate change by outright denial of the evidence." (Guardian, 20 September) Capitalists are only interested in profits, they don't give a damn about your children or their children's

future. That is capitalism.

## A Toxic Society

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimate at least 90,000 people die every year of asbestos related diseases but that didn't stop the manufacture of the obnoxious material. "Chrysotile asbestos, a known human carcinogen, will remain off a global "watch list" of toxic substances for at least two more years after countries led by Canada blocked consensus in United Nations talks on Friday. ... Canada, whose French-speaking Quebec province is a major asbestos producer and exporter, led opposition to its addition to the list, according to environmentalists tracking the talks. Canadian officials say putting chrysotile asbestos on the list would be tantamount to banning international trade in it and threaten jobs." (Yahoo! News, 13 October) 90,000 deaths a year is a mere inconvenience compared to a couple of bucks for the owning class who make

their money from death and disease. That is why we are socialists, also some of us once worked in shipyards, where they used asbestos, and we have difficulty breathing.

## Cut Price Killers

"BP, the British oil group, had a "checkbook mentality" towards safety and was aware of maintenance backlogs and unsafe equipment at its Texas City refinery years before the fire there in 2005 in which 15 workers died, according to findings from US safety officials. ... Safety was compromised by a succession of budget cuts ... The company implemented a 25 per cent cut on fixed costs between 1998 and 2000 which adversely affected maintenance expenditure at the refinery." (Times, 31 October) In order to compete inside capitalism firms are constantly trying to cut overheads. In this case leading to the death and injury of many



The Texas City refinery fire

workers. That is how capitalism operates. Nasty aint it?

## Gangster Talk

The recent electoral losses of the Republican Party in the USA have led to the Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld quitting his post. His political demise led to newspapers running articles on him. Here are a couple of his past statements that were quoted. "Death has a tendency to encourage a depressing view of war" and "You get a lot more with a kind word and a gun than you do with a kind word alone." (Times, 9 November) It is significant that this last statement of Rumsfeld was a quote from the gangster Al Capone. We can understand why a US Defence Secretary would have admired a

murderous gangster chief, after all they both lived in a capitalist society based on violence.

## Bull In A China Shop

The media mogul Rupert Murdoch has been making strenuous efforts to break in to the Chinese market, but in 1993 he made a mess of it by stating, "Advances in the technology of telecommunications are an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere." The Chinese took this threat seriously and imposed strict rules on satellite dishes thus depriving Murdoch's Star TV of the huge Chinese potential audience. "The following year Star removed BBC World Television from its Chinese service, in a move that was regarded by many as a sop to the Chinese government." (Observer, 12 November) Last month Murdoch was in China trying to sweet talk his way in with government officials. When it comes to making money democratic views take a back seat with capitalists like Murdoch. What is suppression of political ideas, imprisonment, torture and death compared with more money to a



billionaire? Very little it seems.

## An American Myth

Supporters of the profit system often site the USA as a good example of how democratic capitalism really is. They give us the old homily about "log cabin to White House" although today it should probably be "trailer park to White House". It is of course a complete fallacy as the following item about the recent mid-term election illustrates. "This election proved that it pays to spend big(ger). The average House winner burned through about \$1 million on the stump - and the candidate who spent the most won in 93% of House races. The most expensive victory was, oddly, one of the Dems' safe bets: New York Senator Hillary Clinton, who won a second term with 67% of the vote - and \$35.9 million." (Time, 20 November) Forget the myths, for a lot of Americans it is "trailer park to trailer park."

## Free Lunch

by Rigg



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