

# Socialist Substandard: 100 years of the socialist party of 1904 - Paul Petard



The fundamental flaws in the parliamentary approach.

This is a slightly re-written version of an article I wrote in 2003 in the run up to the 100th anniversary of the SPGB in 2004.

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## **Socialist Substandard** **100 years of the socialist party of 1904** *(Paul Petard)*

### *A libertarian socialist critique of the politics of the SPGB*

As a part time cartoonist I get a buzz out of seeing my drawings popping up in various political papers and mags from time to time. I was pleased to see one of my cartoons appearing a couple of years back in the Socialist Standard, paper of the Socialist Party of Great Britain for example. But just because I'm pleased to see my cartoon appear in their paper it doesn't mean I won't whinge and express criticisms about their politics. In 2004 their party was 100 years old, so what do they still stand for after all these years and has a full century and a bit of making socialist propaganda been of much use to the world?

The SPGB are quite a weird bunch, "You will be astounded!" declares the introductory literature they will send you if you make a written inquiry to their party (SPGB, 52 Clapham

High St, London, SW4 7UN, U.K.). Well you certainly will be astounded but not necessarily in quite the way they might want you to be.

They are "impossibilists" who have been stuck in an historic timewarp since 1904. They are not a bunch like the SWP who obviously stand for state capitalist policies and democratic-centralist machiavellianism, and act in practise as aggressive guard dogs for various existing institutional factional powerbases in parts of academia, the labour left, and the official trade union bureaucracy. They predate the 1917 Russian Bolshevik revolution, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Mao and all that. They are more of an antiquated puritan mix of Marx and William Morris.

In "Non-market socialism in the 19th and 20th Centuries." (Edited by M. Rubel and J. Crump) Stephen Coleman writes the following about them:

"The most typically possibilist and historically enduring product of the split in the Social Democratic Federation emerged in 1904 when the majority of the London "impossibilists" (as opposed to "possibilists" reformists).... formed a new party: The Socialist Party of Great Britain." They "adopted an Object and Declaration of Principles which has not since changed." and, "If one turns to the Socialist Standard of 1904 one can read basically the same analysis of capitalism and statements about socialism as would be found in 1934 or 1984."

Now I suppose you have to be as dull and boring yourself as a group like the SPGB in order to be bothered to sit down and write a critique of their politics. Well if this is true it's a fair cop, we plead guilty. But on a serious note a critique of "impossibilism" helps go part way to developing a wider critique of aspects of the revolutionary/ultra left/libertarian communist political scene and some of its politics. Parts of this scene I have been involved in myself for over the last twenty years and no doubt will continue to have some kind of involvement with for the foreseeable future.

Before we start it should be noted that there is a significant number of SPGB members who will privately admit that they don't actually strictly believe half of what the SPGB claims to stand for in their formal object and declaration of principles, just like there are members of the Industrial Workers of the World who aren't strictly syndicalists and there were individual members of the Anarchist Communist Federation who candidly admitted they weren't strictly anarchists, like there are people who go to church who admit they are atheists. This kind of phenomenon isn't necessarily "wrong" and might even sometimes be politically healthy, but it requires a whole separate article to deal with and analyse. But for now we will take what the SPGB claim to stand for on paper and start from there...

The SPGB's line on things begins with three claims regarding "socialism" (and we are assuming here the definition of the word "socialism" to mean free communism, non-state communism, rather than state socialism):

1. Socialism has long been an idea but nowhere a practise.
2. When it is established it must be globally.
3. World Socialism can only be achieved democratically.

They then go on to outline a simple vision of future utopian world socialism, with socialised production for need not profit, without money or wage labour. And they outline the main purpose of their party; to educate the majority of society about this utopian vision and "make socialists" through propaganda. When, through the process of "making socialists" by propaganda, the majority of individuals are finally conscious of the need for socialism, then they will elect a majority of socialist MPs into parliament who will then declare "Socialism" in one act.

Hm, perhaps the reader does not need me to continue with a critique of the SPGB as they can see the problems here already and are about to switch on the telly and watch match of the day instead. But yawn not poor reader and stay tuned with us as we chisel away at the all too possible fossil of impossibilism.

Claim no.1 about socialism, "Socialism has long been an idea but nowhere a practise." is a denial of socialism as an actual material historical tendency and an historic movement, a particular set of social relations and material conditions that from time to time begin to emerge and re-emerge in real movements struggles and revolts. It is a cover up of socialism as a recurring expression of class struggles and social struggles. It is a reduction of socialism to a mere religious and mythical ideal projected into the future.

"Heaven or jam tomorrow, if only those stupid clots would open their minds to the idea". The material struggle for "socialism" is likely to also involve ideas and can even be inspired part of the time by utopian ideals, but socialism itself is not just an idea. Socialism has long been a partially attempted practise giving rise to and making use of a collection of ideas.

The second claim regarding socialism, "When it is established it must be globally", implies a sort of managerial exercise of "establishing" socialism, a formal suspension of history or all histories...by who? and how? Again this is a cover up of the actual course of class struggles and social struggles. Socialism as a general tendency becomes global, but specific socialistic outbreaks will begin at certain times in certain situations. A purist maximalist position such as "what we need is world socialism now" may be virtually perfect but may at the same time be virtually useless in actually helping in the imperfect messy reality of struggles.

When faced with practical class struggle objections that their utopianist maximalist impossibilist (non-)intervention doesn't work the SPGB will cry "But Socialism has never been tried". This is one of their favourite interjections. But history does not proceed on the basis of a series of artificial exercises of the whole world all together "trying" this or that "system" as if we are all children in a classroom.

Yes, if everybody simultaneously stopped what they were doing and sat on their hands then there would be no exploitation, no wars and there would be world peace. But everybody doesn't simultaneously stop what they're doing and sit on their hands. And what is needed in particular, and what is absent in the SPGB's politics, is some sort of decent materialist explanation of how come everybody in the world, not even all the working class, doesn't simply simultaneously stop what they are all doing and sit on their hands or whatever. Is it simply because the party cadre haven't sold enough copies of the Socialist Standard this week? It is a useless truism to say "But Socialism has never been tried". However in another sense, the workers and dispossessed, in giving expression to their unfulfilled needs and obstructed potentials in the course of various real struggles that break out, are always making partial attempts at socialism time and time again.

Part of the trouble is that strictly speaking, and this may "astound" the reader, there isn't actually one big immediately unified totalised so called "Capitalism". There isn't actually one big immediately unified strictly coherent total social capital, completely subsuming and dominating everything everywhere all the time (in *Das Kapital*, Marx never actually uses the word "capitalism"). For instance, if there was just one big immediately unified capital in the world it would lead to one big monopoly, which would cancel out competition, which would cancel out an equalisation process, and thus cancel out the law of value, so it wouldn't be capital anymore. It would be a different "mode" of production (some kind of bureaucratic neo-despotism perhaps? maybe this is already half happening?).

Nor in reality do the workers and dispossessed form one big immediately unified and strictly coherent working class, or perfectly formed "Proletariat", that can get to grips with this

supposed "Capitalism" with one big hand and overthrow it in one big act. Nor in fact is there one central absolutely perfect apocalyptic "Socialism" that can be suddenly declared and rule everywhere for evermore. In reality socialism is diverse and comes in awkward fits and starts as various struggles and revolts progress, it is not some religious millenarian end of time.

The SPGB's third claim about socialism, "World socialism can only be achieved democratically" contains more of a hint as to the party's practise and proposed method of intervention, but it is not one we have much time for.

(Mind you at least they actually have some kind of practise and intervention, some ultra-withdrawalist groups are rumoured to exist that have given up on any kind of intervention at all, to the extent that they don't even put out any propaganda or talk to anyone. Nobody, including themselves, are sure if they even exist anymore.)

Today "Democracy" is for the most part an expression of the power of the dominant markets and commodity relations. Established "Democracy" has become the political wing of the dominant capitals and commodities (and also rival bureaucracies) and their ongoing negotiations. There is a significance to the choice of the word "Democracy", and as to why the modern big bourgeoisie and capitalists have deliberately chosen this word as their leading political word rather than any other. A political name or word will contain a program, and the word "Democracy" lends itself to the neo-liberal market capitalist program particularly well. The "rule of the People" becomes turned into the political rule of the collectivity, and its politician representatives, of the atomised competitive citizen-voter-consumers, mainly reflecting a dictatorship of capital and commodity built upon dispossessed wage labour.

Even in the abstract, without capital, "Democracy" might imply a formal rule of the majority over the minority, or the rule of "The People" as an institutionalised collectivity, or mass self imposed despotism, or collective proprietor, all of which can be quite tyrannical and oppressive over those real individuals it rules. People often forget that "Democracy" is still anocracy, it is still a system of rule. "Democracy" is not inherently always nice, sometimes it is perfectly capable of being horrible, it can be used as a vehicle for imposing all sorts of oppression and exploitation.

The impossibilists' insistence all the time on the democratic method is an attack on the sometimes necessary and unavoidable spontaneity, minority action, and free communal solidarity, in struggles. It is a reduction of politics to just alienated separated ideas and atomised liberal opinions of citizens all of which are equally valid, merely to be formally debated and voted on in an artificial debating chamber. Not surprisingly the SPGB are particularly fond of formal debating, even with the local labour and tory parties who they are quite happy to provide a platform for. The SPGB's belief in democracy is a belief in politics as an alienated sphere of activity divorced from the material clashes and conflicts of real social life.

Meanwhile, if a particular group of workers such as the tube train drivers had to first seek democratic majority approval from the population, or even from the majority of workers, every time they needed to strike then in reality they would never be able to strike. Or if a particular group of workers withdraws their labour in defiance of some anti-strike law for example then they will be acting "undemocratically", but this may be a necessary part of class struggle. Socialism is NOT just an idea, it is a material need for proletarians and dispossessed. And that need periodically expresses itself in outbreaks of socialistic struggle and revolt. Sometimes in its unpredictable, spontaneous and insurrectional character it is not always the same as "democracy".

The SPGB's own critique of the existing liberal democracy is simply on the level of a cynicism about the parliament and professional politicians. It is shallow and simplistic to the

level of dishonesty and hypocrisy, leaving the door open of course for their own participation in the diversions of bourgeois electoral circuses. We need not worry they are about to seize power as they never get more than a handful of votes. But bourgeois elections are not just a joke, they are a very important ideological mobilisation exercise for the system, participating in them from whatever supposed political platform nearly always ends up contributing to the bourgeois political marketplace and its spurious debate. Any parliamentary strategy involves elitism whether impossibilists admit it or not. It also involves an acceptance to some degree of the nation state's constitution; deference to and recognition of the national institutions, the national parliament and the national borders, etc....

The educationalist approach of the SPGB turns the fight for socialism into an oppressive patronising Sunday school preaching exercise. The process of "making socialists" becomes like recruiting new sales people into a double glazing selling campaign. This misery of preaching implies a didacto-vanguardism and an elitist-teacherism, ultimately a patronising dictatorship of the "socialist" clergy who alone begin with consciousness of the mystical socialist truth, rather than in practise a mass social movement and struggle of proletarians and dispossessed and others for communistic social relations. Didacto-vanguardism, by hiding behind "socialism" as an ideal to be preached, maintains an elitist agenda in lecturing the working class about what they already know.

In fact millions of working class people, together with millions of people of other classes, both in the west and around the world are already quite consciously aware in the back of their minds that capitalist conditions and domination are crap, and that free and equal social production for need not profit would be better. The impossibilists' preaching the gospel truth Sunday school approach is aloof, detached, patronising, and treating workers as all generally simple.

"Consciousness" does not just come from individual persuasion and propaganda. The spread of socialist ideas does not depend exclusively on the efforts of one or other particular socialist sect but is generated by the need for struggle itself. The SPGB will tend to remain aloof from most actual specific struggles, movements and strikes, although it is noticeable that in the last few years some of their leaflets and literature have become a little more open towards them and less sneering. Amusingly, even this slight opening up has led to a small split of ultra-puritan hardliners. These hardliners now denounce the majority who still publish the "Socialist Standard" paper as being the "Clapham Anarchists" (well we reckon the more anarchy in Clapham the better).

Traditionally the impossibilist approach is a symptom of withdrawal from real struggles disguised by token formal involvement in some organisation for the sake of organisation (and of course paper selling). The SPGB usually appear relatively nice and quaint and inoffensive, particularly in comparison to the trotskyist and leninoid rackets, they are for the most part harmless. But despite the SPGB numbering at most about five hundred members (together with perhaps a few thousand(?) members of the "world Socialist Movement" they are attached to) they still have minor potential to act as a trojan horse for the parliamentary "Democratic" agenda in the midst of critical workers discussions.

The object and declaration of principles does trot out the usual blockhead vulgar Marxist formulation about seizing state power to use it to "emancipate" the workers: "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 organise 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."

The problem here of course is that the government and armed forces don't exist only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class. They also exist to serve their own elite, patriarchal, bureaucratic, military-despotic and neo-aristocratic interests, as well as the partisan state capitalist interests of certain factions of the capitalist class. So the state is actually a partial obstruction, in a reactionary way, to general monopoly by the capitalist class. If politicians and leaders and representatives claiming to represent the working class, even if they themselves come from a working class background, manage to gain positions of power in the government, then in practise they themselves become parasitical elitists, bureaucrats and state capitalists. The state is not neutral "machinery" or "instrument", merely to be captured by this class or that class, but always involves oppressive and exploitative bureaucratic class interests of its own. From a genuine socialist point of view it needs to be disbanded and abolished, not taken over or "converted" which is a reformist policy. So here another element of reformism in the politics of the SPGB is exposed.

We also need to look at the SPGB's class analysis. This basically takes the line that virtually everyone, apart from the uppermost richest capitalists, who is technically a wage earner or salary earner or self employed or unemployed or a dependent is working class, and that under the ideological surface the working class all have more or less the same immediate common interest. So the "middle class" or "middle classes" don't exist. Now the term "middle class" is a bit of a clumsy, vague and unsatisfactory term so for the rest of this rant we are going to keep it in inverted commas. We might agree that the "Middle Class" as a full on coherent single class for itself, separate from other classes, doesn't exist (perhaps the nearest it comes to doing so is in the form of the SWP).

We are not here primarily interested in regional and cultural social caste stereotyping, or in some scapegoating campaign against individuals just because they happen to come from a sociological family background that might be labelled as "middle class". Also whatever class people think they are, and these days there is a growing number of people who don't consciously identify with any class at all, it is not the whole of the story. "Class" is not just about cultural identity. If it were, Margaret Thatcher who regarded herself as a hard worker would be working class, a skilled manual worker who has polite manners and likes classical music would be middle class, and a mental patient who thought they were Louis XIV would be aristocracy. Nor is it reducible to just a question of political identity. We are sceptical of those ultra-left or neo-bordigist tautologies that try to define a "Proletariat for itself" in terms of the struggle of the "revolutionary party". We would argue that questions of class have to rest on a basic economic meaning, as well as social, cultural, and political identity factors.

The "middle classes" with a small c, do seem to have some sort of existence, and their existence is not just a cultural identity or propaganda problem but also a material problem from the point of view of working class formation and class struggle. And there are clearly hierarchical gradations and "intermediate strata" within the wider "working class" that, at least on the short term, together with sectoralisation and atomisation in general, involve specific material obstacles to practical class wide solidarity. The "middle classes" have an existence in the form of a broad coalition of small capitalists, small traders, small landlords and self-employed small business people on the one hand, and specifically protected professional, managerial and bureaucratic elite workers on the other.

One problem with an exercise like trying to define the "middle classes" is that if you pick on whatever arbitrary fixed category to define them you are always going to find some of your friends (or even yourself shock horror!!), happen to fit into it. As a result, having stigmatised

your friends as part of the "middle classes", they are liable not to speak to you again. The way to get round this is to point out that hierarchical gradations of many varieties are an ongoing process to which all the working classes are continually being subjected. Hierarchical gradations are continually being produced and reproduced. It could be argued that, in the west in particular, a large portion of the population have been suspended in a temporary(?) state of being intermediate strata for well over fifty years now. Proletarianisation is also a process to which workers will be subjected.

It is not just a question of levels of income, although growing income differentials certainly matter, and whether or not you've got cash in your pocket is going to have an influence on how you might have to struggle from day to day. But it is also a question of such things as protected privileged status for certain professional workers, hierarchical protectionism amongst workers in general (racial and sexual discrimination, paternalism, nepotism etc...) hierarchies of control, and small business and "petit bourgeois" interests. It is more than just "contradictions within the working class". The working class always contains contradictions in the sense that most workers have to compete against each other, and workers work in contradiction to their own interests while exploited in capitalist wage labour. It is also that there are privileged hierarchies within the wider "working class", that "workers" are not necessarily wage labourers, and wage labourers are not necessarily proletarians.

Let's rummage through the crumpled half torn pages of some rantings by old Mr Marx for a bit and see if he can enlighten us at all. (Marx, Grundrisse, Penguin...)

P.295: "Separation of property from labour appears as the necessary law of this exchange between capital and labour."

P.297: "The worker [as free wage labourer] is absolutely indifferent to the specificity of their labour; it has no interest for them as such, but only in as much as it is in fact labour and, as such, a use value for capital... This is not the character of the craftsperson and guild-member etc., whose economic character lies precisely in the specificity of their labour and in their relation to a specific master, etc."

P.604: "It is already contained in the concept of the free labourer, that they are a pauper: virtual pauper. According to their economic conditions they are merely a living labour capacity, hence equipped with the necessaries of life. Necessity on all sides, without the objectivities necessary to realise themselves as labour capacity."

Workers are not necessarily wage labourers; Artisans, tradespeople, self-employed, contractors, all of these may be "workers" but they are not wage labourers. A person who is technically a wage labourer might also have other significant economic interests or reserves. There are quite a few people with day jobs who also run part time small businesses or who own properties they rent out or who have profitable self-sustaining investments off which they might be able to subsist independently from social support if they lost their job. In some parts of the world there are still millions of wage labourers who, individually or through family ties, still have some access to the land and still retain some semi-peasant interests, such as a smallholding on which they might grow a significant proportion of their food etc.

In reality all of these wage labourers are not completely "separated from property" or completely pauperised. People with access to some independent economic means might still get jobs for a variety of reasons such as habit/ work-ethic/ status/ boredom/ extra cash/ tax avoidance/ or even a genuine interest in the particular job as a skill or profession... Even Prince Edward spent some time employed as an "administrative assistant" for a theatre company. Such people are therefore technically wage labourers in the context of their particular jobs but they are not absolute proletarians. They are not strictly "without reserves". If they go on strike they can be objectively anti-capitalist in their immediate action, but they

might do this either from the perspective of general solidarity or from the perspective of their own specific privileged self interest.

In some of the "developed" and "imperialist" countries the majority of wage labourers if they lose their jobs are provided, as "citizens", with temporary social reserves by a Keynesian welfare state, and even if they did not receive this there are some limited autonomous social reserves in the community that many can temporarily on, it is unlikely in reality that the majority of them would begin to starve after seven days. So in this part of the world at least, by no means all of the wider "working class" in general are all immediately merely living labour capacity with strictly no access to other means. So if by "working class" we just mean all wage labourers and their families, then in general they don't all have immediately the same economic interests or exactly the same relation to the economy. The "proletariat" is an abstract hypothetical tendency. But in reality there is there an absolute "proletarian" condition that can successfully universalise?.

There is also a subtle difference between a wage (paid weekly at so much an hour) and a salary (paid monthly at so much a year). A salary might be a recognition that an employee is not fully proletarianised- and not fully stripped of elite skill or professional status by the labour process. But de-skilling is an inherent part of the labour process under capitalist production.

What is sometimes referred to as the "professional and managerial sector" is not fully proletarian. Privileged, empowered, enriched and often with special protected status they are not absolutely impoverished free labour with nothing but general (unskilled or easily acquired skilled) abstract labour to sell.

A professional police officer in the U.K. might own no property, have no savings, be working strictly on the books and not be taking any bribes. In which case they will be a mere salaried worker. But their rent is specially subsidised, their pay is fixed by the government and pegged to inflation, it is still difficult to sack a police officer, they have bureaucratically protected elite professional status which protects them from genuine open competition in the labour market in the present and will give them economic advantage in the future. Of course they also have the elite petit-despotic power and privilege of being entitled to whack you with a big stick. In a crisis, even if the banks and the currency and the payment of wages temporarily collapsed, the state would intervene to ensure they had special food and housing.

So in reality their "living" doesn't exclusively depend on earning money. They are not "free" labour, that is they are not free to compete or free to starve. Their situation as "wage labourers" is partially suspended and specially protected (well over and above normal "protections" of general employment; minimum wage, minimum legal employment standards etc., which in turn are only available to the "citizens" and not to "illegal" migrant workers etc.), and it is kept that way on a permanent basis. And a "salary" is sometimes often an expression of such protected status, protected from equalisation of wages, sheltered from the storms of free competition and the "law of value" behind the barriers of state intervention and bureaucratic command. Yes the police are "workers in uniform", but they are not free labour in uniform, they are not proletarians on the beat. (Nor of course are they unprivileged unfree "protected" labour like prison labour; slave labour). The "working class" is not economically coherent or homogenous.

Such an analysis as applies to the police might also apply to a whole range of socially or bureaucratically protected professional elites such as top medics/ school heads/ middle and upper civil servants/ lawyers and judges/ top academics and scientists etc. who are usually tied to protective official professional bodies recognised by the state which are halfway to being a modern kind of guild. They don't have to compete with the majority of the



unemployed in an open free labour market. They don't even have to compete freely with the majority of unemployed who happen to have similar material skills and abilities. There is a disproportionate number of professional service workers sustained in the west due to such things as keynesianism, imperialism and an international division of labour. (The argument of leftists like the Revolutionary Communist Group that the majority of western workers are "privileged" because their situation is subsidised by unfree or unequal revenue flows from "exploitation" of the "third world" needs to be given critical consideration, it can't just be dismissed out of hand. Part of the problem with somebody like the RCG is that they will tend to frame the question in terms of third world "nations" or "peoples" rather than in terms of the world's workers and dispossessed a large majority of whom are in the "developing" and "third" worlds.) Professional status workers are also likely to have a keen interest in and ideological belief in the specialisation they do as a thing in itself, not just as a technical skill that earns them money.

Now some protected professional workers may on the long run find themselves being subject to an opening up of competition and a demoting of their professional status as capital knocks down protective walls and barriers and pushes people into the open competitive market to try and lower wages. But as well as losers, capitalist competition generates new winners with new wealth who will then try and construct new social barriers or buy new protected privilege for themselves. For instance meritocratic parents might use their money to buy unmeritocratic advantage in the labour market for their kids by paying for their private education to give them more inbuilt qualified advantage over others. Equal competitive opportunity in the labour market can trip itself up as it is precisely market competition that can help generate the forces that will try and construct new barriers and new protected privilege.

Bureaucratic and professional protected status particularly well equips one to engage in forms of crude accumulation, for instance if the police officer does take bribes or sells on confiscated drugs, or if there is managerial corruption, bureaucratic hustling, professional perks,... And this crude petit mercantile accumulation helps contribute to the entrenching of protected professional bureaucratic privilege. In the petit bourgeois world not all trading and hustling, even today, is merely about the realisation of capitalist commodities and the equalisation process of the rate of profit between capitals. Meanwhile in the modern professional and managerial world, if high professional salaries are artificially protected from the equalisation of wages does that not give rise to a form of bureaucratic mercantile hustle? And are not funds of professional bodies and professional associations which help to buy their status in part an expression of such a modern bureaucratic mercantile hustle?

The simplistic class analysis of socialists like the impossibilists virtually amounts to saying "everybody's working class apart from the fat controller". On a simplistic level this is true, or at least comforting, but this is a bit of a cover up of the real significance of sectors such as elite protected professional, managerial, and bureaucratic workers. That is they are never fully proletarianised/ subject to the capitalist free labour process.

There are other sectors of the wider "working class" who are more subject to the labour process of dispossession and reduction towards mere general free abstract labour, but are not subject directly to the industrial commodity production process. For instance ordinary service workers in the private sector, or casual and less secure non-professional public sector workers... These workers are more proletarian but their immediate relation and struggle with the bosses is not qualitatively the same as proletarians employed directly in commodity production (this does not imply an inferiority in struggle, but a difference in the immediate nature of their struggle in relation to capital). Outbreaks of struggle are immediately complex they are not always immediately generalise-able. The class struggle is not even, or universal,

or even always necessarily socialistic(!), it can begin with limited attempts at winning temporary ameliorative reforms.

The tendency under capital to push much of the population towards proletarianisation and force us all into competitive "meritocracy" is obstructed by contradictory counter tendencies of capital to keep some sectors of workers outside the capitalist labour process and production process. Some of these workers are maintained as part of the continually reinvented "lower middle classes". Hence there is a need for particular industrial strategies at particular times which can deal with the different specificities of the wider working class, rather than just a timeless and general strategy. Different kinds and points of power need to be identified and utilised in a particular way in the working class (Hence chanting the mantra "generalise the struggle" is a bit vague at the best of times.).

Impossibilism and utopianism contribute virtually nothing on the subjects of specific tactics and strategy at particular moments with particular workers. They become a tiresome and useless repeating of simplistic socialist platitudes. The question; "Should we smash the ice?" is a very important tactical question in your life if you're a rebel sailor or worker on Kronsadt naval base 1921 and trotsky is about to send in the red army to kill you. The impossibilist maximalist would simply say: "This awkward dilemma of whether to smash the ice or not just shows how terrible capitalism is, so whether the ice gets smashed or not the problem is capitalism, and we need to replace it with democratic socialism". Or they might argue that a democratic vote of all the workers should be taken as to whether the ice should be broken, but by the the time all the ballot papers were in the ice had already been crossed. If there is a wave of industrial unrest should office workers picket their own individual workplaces or join mass flying pickets to blockade strategic industrial centres like oil depots? This too could become an important and necessary question. Nobody has the perfect answer to such questions but you have to get your hands dirty and attempt to deal with them in practise, you can't remain aloof.

You have to face up to and deal with real material inequalities and sectoralisations within the class, in order to build genuine class wide solidarity. It is only that class wide solidarity that can seriously confront the capital process successfully, not that confronting the capital process is strictly the whole story, and the struggle for socialism isn't exclusively the work of one "Class" anyway, what about the peasants for example?

"Capital... creates the mass of individuals who are forced to rise against capital itself. This mass is not homogenous, but it will forge its unity in the communist revolution, although its components will not play the same role." (Dauve, Eclipse & Re-emergence, Antagonism Press, BM Makhno, WC1N 3XX.) As part of constructing solidarity it will be necessary to look at the different needs of different sectors of workers, and how these complex needs might be married up in the course of battle. That is why an ongoing project of complex class analysis which attempts to deal with various questions such as the question of the so called "middle classes" is valid and necessary. Simply sloganizing that virtually everyone who isn't a rich capitalist is a worker and all workers should instantly get together because they are all presumed to have the same immediate interests against capital unfortunately doesn't work.

Capitalism's left would get rid of the capitalists while maintaining the capital process. "If these people [capitalists] were eliminated, while the rest of the system remained the same, part of the surplus-value would be given to the workers and the rest would be invested in collective and social equipment, welfare etc.: this is in fact the programme of the left,..." (Dauve, Eclipse). A hypothetical authentic state socialism might actually suspend the capitalist system and wage labour but maintain hierarchical bureaucratic privilege and state property, at least for a decade or two, until it imploded. A socialist insurrectionary social

movement, of proletarians and others, has a need to wage war not just against capital and wage labour but against all managerial, bureaucratic and mercantile forms as well. Paul 2006

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