

socialist standard

March 2021
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

**PEOPLE
POWER**



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Also:
Imperialism VI
British Chicken
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socialist standard

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Introducing the Socialist Party

The Socialist Party advocates a society where production is freed from the artificial constraints of profit and organised for the benefit of all on the basis of material abundance. It does not have policies to ameliorate aspects of the existing social system. It is opposed to all war.

The *Socialist Standard* is the combative monthly journal of the Socialist Party, published without interruption since 1904. In the 1930s the *Socialist Standard* explained why capitalism would not collapse of its own accord, in response to widespread claims to the contrary, and continues to hold this view in face of the notion's recent popularity. Beveridge's welfare measures of the 1940s were viewed as a reorganisation of poverty and a necessary 'expense' of production, and Keynesian policies designed to overcome slumps an illusion. Today, the journal exposes as false the view that banks create money out of thin air, and explains why actions to prevent the depredation



of the natural world can have limited effect and run counter to the nature of capitalism itself.

Gradualist reformers like the Labour Party believed that capitalism could be transformed through a series of social measures, but have merely become routine managers of the system. The Bolsheviks had to be content with

developing Russian capitalism under a one-party dictatorship. Both failures have given socialism a quite different -- and unattractive -- meaning: state ownership and control. As the *Socialist Standard* pointed out before both courses were followed, the results would more properly be called state capitalism.

The Socialist Party and the World Socialist Movement affirm that capitalism is incapable of meaningful change in the interests of the majority; that the basis of exploitation is the wages/money system. The *Socialist Standard* is proud to have kept alive the original idea of what socialism is -- a classless, stateless, wageless, moneyless society or, defined positively, a democracy in which free and equal men and women co-operate to produce the things they need to live and enjoy life, to which they have free access in accordance with the principle 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'

Resistance is not enough

A decade has passed since a tidal wave of revolt swept across the Middle East and North Africa washing away autocratic regimes in its wake. That this happened seemed to have not only taken the local dictators by surprise, but also the rest of the world. And yet it should not have done. After years of state repression combined with economic hardship that had been made worse by the 2008 financial crisis, working people had had enough and rose up to struggle for political democracy. High unemployment, especially among young workers, and poor economic prospects were the tinderbox. The suicide of a street seller in Tunisia was the spark.

We can see similar dynamics recently working themselves out in Russia and Myanmar. In January, Alexey Navalny, a long-time opponent of Putin, returned to Russia after being treated for nerve agent poisoning in Berlin. He was arrested and imprisoned on a charge of violating his parole conditions relating to a suspended sentence he received in 2014 for embezzlement. This sparked rallies and protests across Russia. Some have descended into violence as the

police cracked down heavily on the demonstrators.

On 1 February in Myanmar, the military, after alleging that voter fraud had helped the National League of Democracy (Aung San Suu Kyi's party) to secure a landslide victory in the November 2020 general election, deposed and detained the elected civilian rulers, including Suu Kyi, and declared direct military rule for one year. In response mass protests have erupted, which have elicited a severe crackdown by the police and the military. Public servants, health workers, teachers and other workers have gone on strike in an attempt to end military rule and restore civilian government.

What is common to these protests is the deteriorating living standards suffered by workers which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and popular disenchantment with the corrupt capitalist rulers who have been accumulating greater amounts of wealth. We can only sympathise with these workers struggling to obtain democratic rights. However, we believe it would be a mistake for them to put their trust in political leaders such as Navalny and

Aung San Suu Kyi. Notwithstanding their particular flaws – Navalny is a Russian nationalist and harbours anti-immigrant positions, and Suu Kyi, while in power, has defended the state persecution of the Rohingya Muslims – they are both committed to upholding the capitalist system which is the source of workers' social problems. They would be overseeing the exploitation of the working class.

Sadly, the uprising of the Arab Spring ten years ago did not bring about democracy for the workers. With the possible exception of Tunisia, autocratic dictatorships still prevail in the region. This does not mean that workers should give up the political fight. On the contrary, we urge workers to struggle not just for political democracy but for a fundamental change in how we organise society. What is needed is a class-conscious working class to organise globally to capture political power democratically to rid the planet of capitalism and establish genuine socialism, a worldwide society without national borders, money or social classes, where everyone can participate equally and enjoy free access to social wealth.

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PATHFINDERS

Speaking of tongues

A YEAR ago most of us were hearing terms like lockdown, social distancing and furlough for the first time. Since then the pandemic has spawned a host of new coinages, such as Miley (as in Miley Cyrus, geddit?), covidiot or morona (someone who behaves as if there's no Miley), quarantini (home martini) fresh from your isobar (well-stocked booze fridge), zoom bombing, coronials (babies conceived in lockdown), and spendemic (the increase in online shopping).

These neologisms probably won't last, but they do showcase the effervescent wit and ingenuity of the working class. People like language. It's not just a tool, it's a toy. And it can be a political hot potato.

Just last December it was reported that Germany is going to revert to its pre-1940s phonetic spelling table (equivalent to English call-signs Alpha, Bravo, Charlie), which the Nazis had altered as being 'too Jewish'. Now Germans will have to remember to say Samuel instead of Siegfried, Zacharias for Zeppelin, Nathan for Nordpol, and David for Dora. It's kind of funny, in a dark sort of way.

Not that we should laugh. Jack went up the hill with their bucket while Jill fell down and broke their crown. Er, whose bucket, whose crown? Apparently it doesn't matter. The woke war against pronouns is making us all into undifferentiated plurals, even when our individual gender is neither an unknown nor a contentious issue. English is abandoning clarity for the sake of a political point, but perhaps that's the price we have to pay for diplomacy. The Germans call each other 'they', the French retain the polite you-plural centuries after the English stopped caring about politeness, while the Italians were put off the you-plural because Mussolini liked it, and now call each other 'she'.

From the standpoint of modern English, which has dispensed with a lot of language rules we were too bored or incompetent to follow, the use of gender in other languages seems bizarre and mysterious, as well as hard to learn and inconsistent. Why is salt female in Spanish, but male in French? Why does the German for 'girl' have a neuter article? Why does 'hand' in Italian have a male form but a female article? What is it with all this sex anyway? It's very unBritish.

After much official foot-dragging, the French are now feminising male nouns so as to recognise the existence of female 'docteurs, professeurs, pompières' (firefighters), although in highlighting gender instead of erasing it completely they're arguably rowing the language

in the wrong direction. Meanwhile the appearance of the weird composite form 'musicien.ne.s' and 'lecteur.rice.s' (readers) is creating a Gallic backlash against what is known as 'inclusive writing', with the French Prime Minister in 2017 imposing a ban on its use in state documents. It may well be true, or at least plausible, that male-biased language forms tend to create male-biased social paradigms, but structurally there's a limit to what you can do. Gendered noun classes run through a huge number of languages like Brighton through a stick of rock. To make them gender-neutral you'd have to dismantle the languages and rebuild them from the ground up.

That's not going to happen, on purpose anyway. People with good pattern-recognition skills often learn to like the forms and structures of languages for their own sake, and can become prim sticklers over its rules, decrying the slightest deviation as an offence of ignorance or heresy. But language was always a matter of ignorance and heresy. People spelt things the way they sounded, and frequently misheard. Un napron became an apron because the Saxons wrote it down wrong. Snottingham became Nottingham because the Normans couldn't pronounce it. Latin crocodilus became coccodrillo because the Italians couldn't pronounce it. Jewellery becomes joolery, nuclear becomes nuclear. What the hell, we know what we mean.

The intolerance set in with Dr Johnson's dictionary and a desire for standardisation. It's impossible to imagine modern capitalism managing its business and communications successfully without such language standards, but it ultimately goes against the grain of what language is, a dynamic and creative process that does not want to lie still and play dead. And it won't, no matter what the rules say.

After dropping genders, case systems and polite forms English is now busily merging its simple past with its perfect past (Sink, sank, sunk = Sink, sunk, sunk). It often doesn't bother with a future tense (I'm going tomorrow), even less with archaic subjunctives (If I were you), and seems increasingly confused about perfect conditionals (I should of known).

Somewhat counter-intuitively, languages tend to become simpler as they evolve, at least if they're allowed to. That being so, it's tempting to wonder if socialism will strip out a lot of legacy linguistics that only really

mean anything in culture-bound capitalism.

Most obviously, you'd expect vocabulary changes. For instance, we may see words like property, money, market, trade, buy and sell fall out of use entirely, along with an entire lexicon of financial, business, judicial and military terms. The words steal and robbery would surely disappear, and hopefully murder and rape along with them.

As for gendered noun classes, it's not hard to envisage socialist society dropping them. And in a society where time isn't money and you don't have to watch the clock, is it a stretch to suggest that even tenses might simplify or even disappear? It's not impossible. Mandarin Chinese manages quite well without tenses (It is cold yesterday).

How might this realistically come about? By revolution, of course, not reform. Consider what happens if people become more mobile, as is quite possible when location and occupation cease to be a ball and chain, and where available transport systems are free at the point of use. Suppose you are a sixteen-year-old and you want to go off and see the world. There's nothing to stop you travelling, perhaps to every country in the world, helping out with the menial jobs wherever you fetch up, and soaking up a global cultural and linguistic experience beyond anything conceivable today except for the idle rich. When 18th century officials of the East India Company returned to England after plundering Bengal, they spoke fluent Hindustani, wore flowing Indian silks and turbans, and built 'Nabob' country houses replete with minarets and domes. They also brought curry to England, thereby transforming the British favourite food. Imagine what worldwide free and open mobility might do for your local town and culture. And with this mobility, languages might flow and merge into a global travellers' creole with remnants of everything in it, just like we get 'sky' from the Vikings, 'telephone' from Greek, 'shampoo' from Hindi and 'paradise' from Persian.

Young white Londoners today speak a hip new Asian-Cockney that didn't exist a generation ago. 'Street' dictionaries have to be updated weekly. The one constant thing about language is change. And that's just as true of the people who speak it. When people get around to creating the post-scarcity world of common ownership which we call socialism, we should expect our languages and cultures to start doing all kinds of interesting and surprising things.

PJS

LETTERS

Reflections

Dear Editors,

I think we can say that, if it doesn't abolish capitalism, humanity doesn't have a very long time, because capitalism is destroying the very planet we live on. As a system, it cannot go against its own *raison d'être*, which is the accumulation of capital. This is the very definition of capitalism, and life itself is sacrificed for it and must always be while the system lasts. Governments cannot resolve this because they are the representatives of capital. Their helmsmen (leaders, presidents, prime ministers, etc.) lead nothing. They cannot control capitalism. It controls them.

Nothing stands still; not in nature nor in society. Ironically, capitalism, with its very destructiveness, is socialism's greatest ally. People, throughout history, become political when the environment they are in compels them to, and this is our hope.

It isn't that the Socialist Party (that is, the real socialist movement for a stateless, classless, moneyless society) could ever convert the majority of the world's workers through its political activity, but that the world's workers themselves will come to the same conclusion as us through many independent routes and threads and coming to that conclusion (that the system of prices and profits, buying and selling, wage-slavery and capital accumulation must go, if we are to save the Earth and if our grandchildren are to live) without any need to study Marx or even to read a single book.

They will come to that conclusion because every reform they attempt, every conservation project they undertake, every patching-up attempt they make, every charitable endeavour of theirs, is punched to the ground by capitalism every day, it being the root cause of all of it: famine, war, poverty, pollution, destruction.

The threads are yet to come together, but I think they are heading in that direction, bit by bit, and independently of us socialists today. That may sound optimistic but the pessimistic alternative is that capitalism will never be got rid of, and will, instead, get rid of life on Earth. That is the distinct possibility. Maybe that will happen, and socialism remain a fond dream. So, are we to give up? I think giving up would be unethical.

It would be unethical toward not just our fellow humans, but all our fellow animals and our planet, and to all the yet unborn too.

A mass movement becomes a reality not one by one, but by tipping points being reached. Initial tipping points are the longest to reach, and successive ones more and more rapid. The first need only take a couple of thousand, after which the pace quickens thereafter – with tipping points also being reached independently in different parts of the globe before contact, after which the pace becomes a deluge.

And this last is why the capitalists' state apparatuses would be helpless to stop it.

ANTHONY WALKER

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COOKING THE BOOKS

Is capitalism based on unsustainable debt?

A new group calling itself 'Blue Revolution' has sent us a couple of pamphlets. In one of them, *The History of Politics Simplified*, they talk of the 'debt based free market system' and make the claim that the 'free market ... relies on an economy that is dependent on debt'. They invoke Marx in support of this:

'... unless change take place the western economy will in the words of Karl Marx collapse under the weight of its economic contradictions ... Reliance on this system will bankrupt the government first and then, the nation.'

Marx never expressed such words. He never wrote of capitalism collapsing under its economic contradictions. He did point out capitalism's contradictions – such as between use-value and exchange value, and between co-operative production and private ownership – but did not expect these to lead to the system's economic collapse. What they did cause was production under capitalism to be erratic, veering continuously between boom and slump and back. His view was that capitalism would have to be brought to an end through conscious action by the wage-working class.

Marx didn't even see dependence on debt as one of capitalism's contradictions. Debt is something owed by somebody or some organisation to some other person or organisation that has lent them money. So, if you are claiming an economic system is based on debt you are at the same time claiming that it is based on lending.

Borrowing (i.e., getting into debt) and lending are certainly features of capitalism, and if lenders stopped lending the system would be in trouble, but why would lenders do that? Banks and other financial institutions make money by lending money (theirs or other people's or organisations') in return for interest, a part of which is their profit.

There are three types of borrowers – individual workers, capitalist enterprises, and governments. Lenders lend workers money to buy consumer items such as household goods, a car or a house but they always check first the chances of getting their money back out of future wages; if they don't think these chances are high enough they will refuse a loan. Lenders lend to capitalist enterprises to invest in some profitable project and calculate whether they will get their money back out of future profits. They lend to states for the interest states will pay them out of taxation.

In all cases they weigh up the chances of

getting their money back with interest and, if the chances are not good enough, they won't lend. They sometimes get it wrong, but not on the systematic and massive scale assumed by those who think that debts are likely to get out of hand and bring the system down.

Ironically perhaps, it is governments that are the least likely to default. This is because they have the power to raise money from taxes. Which is why, when they scent a recession coming, financial institutions switch to buying government debt (bonds). The leading capitalist states are not going to go bankrupt; their borrowing is sustainable and lenders know it.

It is lending to capitalist enterprises that causes trouble for the system from time to time. Capitalist enterprises are driven by the pursuit of profits; in a boom one sector always eventually overestimates the chances of this, as do those who lend them money. The result is an economic downturn and financial crisis. However, this is not the end of the system. Slumps eventually create the conditions for a recovery by restoring profit-making prospects, and profit-making and capital accumulation resume until the next slump.

The present economic system is not dependent on debt but on making profits.

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GLOBAL SOCIALISM

'**V**asudhaiva Kutumbakam' is a Sanskrit phrase found in Hindu holy texts such as the Maha Upanishad, the Rig Veda and the Bhagavata, which means 'the world is one family'. Although anti-religion, the companion parties in the World Socialist Movement embody that concept in our axiom 'One world, One people.'

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the climate emergency has shown us that there is something very wrong with the system we live under. It has led many people to contemplate a future other than apocalyptic catastrophes and instead hold hope that the threat of pollution and plague might lead to a better world. Both crises have made clear the oneness of the peoples of the world. What we share is much more powerful than what keeps us apart. All people are inescapably interconnected, and the more we can come together to solve our problems, the better our chances that we can avoid a possible collapse of civilisation.

Capitalism, through its creation of a world market, has broken down many of the barriers between the nations. The capitalist method of production draws all the peoples of the globe together. But this same capitalism also promotes the strengthening of nationalism through trade wars that from time to time turn into armed conflicts to secure more of that world market. Commercial rivalries intensify national enmities. That is why the idea of a world community and universal peace cannot prosper under capitalist society.

Whereas the globalisation influence of the corporations is continually frustrated by competing national capitalisms, the internationalism of the working people is strengthened by the mutual solidarity of the interests of all the workers, regardless of their location or nationality. The position of the workers is almost identical in its essential features throughout the world. While the interests of the capitalists of different countries unceasingly conflict with one another, the interests of the working class coincide and workers come to realise this in the course of their struggles. For instance, in their attempts to secure higher wages, a reduction of hours, and other workplace protections, our fellow workers continually meet obstacles, which arise from the competition between the capitalists of various nations. An increase in wages or a reduction of the working day in any particular country is undermined by the competition of other countries in which these reforms have not yet been achieved. Such things convince workers of the solidarity of their interests and of the necessity for joining forces in the struggle to improve their condition.

Emancipation from wage slavery is unthinkable without a worldwide socialist reconstruction of society. The Socialist Party's goal is the union of the workers of the whole world in a common struggle for liberation, the greatest social movement in human history. A movement is rooted in the blood, sweat and tears of millions who have spent their lives throughout history clamouring for a better society that works for everyone. This movement does not appear by magic and we need to consciously commit ourselves to the systemic transformation to a classless society where the resources of the Earth become the common heritage of all humanity. Humanity can work together to prevail over problems and learn the folly of battling one another.

The climate crisis and the pandemic demonstrate the mutual dependencies of the world's peoples and the requirement that the planet's resources be redirected for the

service of health and peaceful life. The overriding goal must be human security, providing food, water, a clean environment and good health for people. Socialists recognise the value of collective social relationships. We're brothers and sisters who must think and act cooperatively to achieve common goals.

We must become one world through genuine cooperation and collaboration among all the people of the world, coordinating to protect humanity. We need a mighty movement to transform the political institutions and economic structures. The same dedication and determination with which wars have been conducted through the ages must now be applied to building a peaceful and prosperous planet.

Human beings can only take so much. The living natural world can only take so much. The peoples of the planet are ripe for change. But unless we make the world socialist commonwealth our goal change may not be necessarily progressive. It could be reactionary and fuelled by religious extremism, xenophobia, racism, and tribalism.

What is up to us within the socialist movement is to present a positive vision of the future. To point out all the mutual aid networks we see flourishing across the world. Now is the time for the alternative. Society must redirect the resources it's currently wasting and instead provide for the needs and wants of people.

To survive and prosper, to fulfil our potential, we must reject divisions and recognise that it is possible to build a new system of social justice. From the chaos of the old, we can create a future civilisation in which humanity can live in harmony. In times of crises such as these, people are offering support to one another. This as an opportunity to reset society for a better future. We can rebuild our society in an egalitarian way, in an environmentally friendly way. We can banish the politics of hatred.

The Socialist Party proposes a society-wide democracy, and an end to the profit system. Working people have had enough of being fed the false arguments that human nature, over-population or shortage of resources prevent socialism and that we need leaders and a process of gradual reforms to bring about a socialist society. We have had enough of waiting. It's possible now. We can bury forever all national chauvinism, racial prejudice, and religious bigotry beginning today.

ALJO



UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

All meetings online during the pandemic. See page 23.

LONDON

North London branch. Meets 3rd Thurs. 8pm at Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 2RX. Contact: Chris Dufton 020 7609 0983 nlb.spgb@gmail.com

South London branch. Meets last Saturday in month, 2.30pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Contact: 020 7622 3811.

West London branch. Meets 1st Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. spgb@worldsocialism.org

MIDLANDS

West Midlands regional branch. Meets last Sat. 3pm (check before attending). Contact: Stephen Shapton. 01543 821180. Email: stephenshapton@yahoo.co.uk.

NORTH

North East Regional branch.

Contact: P. Kilgallon, c/o Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN.

Lancaster branch. Meets 3rd Mon, 3pm, Friends Meeting House, Meeting House Lane. Ring to confirm: P. Shannon, 07510 412 261, spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org.

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

Bolton. Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.

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

Doncaster. Contact: Fredi Edwards, fredi.edwards@hotmail.co.uk

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

Kent and Sussex regional branch. Meets 2nd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ. Contact: spgb.ksr@worldsocialism.org.

South West regional branch. Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm at the Railway Tavern, 131 South Western Road, Salisbury SP2 7RR.

Contact: Stephen Harper spgbsw@gmail.com
Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me

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Luton. Contact: Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP.

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SCOTLAND

Edinburgh branch. Meets 1st Thurs. 7-9pm. The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. Contact: J. Moir. 0131 440 0995. jimmyjmoir73@gmail.com

Branch website: <http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/>

Glasgow branch. Meets 1st and 3rd Tues. at 7pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Contact: Peter Hendrie, 75 Lairhills Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0LH. 01355 903105. peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk.

Dundee. Contact: Ian Ratcliffe, 12 Finlow Terrace, Dundee, DD4 9NA. 01382 698297.

Ayrshire. Contact: Paul Edwards 01563 541138. rainbow3@btopenworld.com.

Lothian Socialist Discussion @Autonomous Centre Edinburgh, ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh EH7 5HA. Meets 4th Weds. 7-9pm. Contact: F. Anderson 07724 082753.

WALES

South Wales Branch (Swansea)

Meets 2nd Mon, 7.30pm (except January, April, July and October), Unitarian Church, High Street, SA1 1NZ. Contact: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. 01792 643624.

South Wales Branch (Cardiff)

Meets 2nd Saturday 12 noon (January, April, July and October) Cafe Nero, Capitol Shopping Centre, Queens Street, Cardiff.

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World Socialist Party (New Zealand) P.O. Box 1929, Auckland, NI, New Zealand.

World Socialist Party of the United States. P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144 USA. boston@wsp.us

PUBLICATIONS

PAMPHLETS (£4.00 each unless stated otherwise)

- What's Wrong With Using Parliament? (£2.50)**
- Ecology and Socialism**
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- Africa: A Marxian Analysis**
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- An Inconvenient Question**
- Sylvia Pankhurst on Socialism (£3.00)**
- Why Socialists Oppose Zionism & Anti-Semitism (£3.50)**
- Rosa Luxemburg on Socialism**
- The Magic Money Myth**

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- Socialism or Your Money Back: £4.00**
- Centenary of the Russian Revolution: £8.00**
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MATERIAL WORLD

Crackdown or Backdown?

WHILE THERE are many unsettling questions posed by Aung Sang Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD)'s complicity in the persecution of ethnic minorities, the World Socialist Movement expresses its solidarity with our Myanmar fellow-workers in their present struggle. Having had a taste of liberty, no matter how limited, the people of Myanmar have shown that they will not passively submit to the return of the army dictatorship. The pro-democracy movement has taken on a life of its own in rejecting the rule of an authoritarian military junta. There is now a new generation of young people accustomed to accessing social media. The defiant three-fingered salute of the Hunger Games movies, adopted by pro-democracy activists in Thailand and Hong Kong has now become the gesture of resistance in Myanmar.

'This movement is leaderless — people are getting on the streets in their own way and at their own will,' said activist Thinzar Shunlei Yi to AP Press.

Peaceful public demonstrations and spontaneous unofficial strikes have become widespread, actions which are full of personal risk as this army has not hesitated in the past to brutally suppress opposition.

There is much speculation about why the army re-imposed full control but we do know that it was not because of any concern about fraud in the November's election. The only way to counter the coup is non-violent civil disobedience of one kind or another to win over the state's forces of coercion, which our fellow workers are now engaged in. This cannot be a fight between the NLD and the generals. It has to be to deprive the junta of legitimacy and recognition and hinder it from functioning by strikes in the hope that this type of mass participation tactic will disable the dictatorship's ability to rule and disrupt the vast business empire of the Tatmadaw (the armed forces). In addition is the anticipation of possible mass defections from the police and army. Nearly fifty police departments in Loikaw, the capital of eastern Kayah state, crossed lines and joined the protest march where the banner read, 'No military dictatorship.' Importantly, without mutinies within the armed forces and police, the ruling clique is likely to win, at least, temporarily.

As the major actor in the Myanmar economy, owning substantial investments, the Tatmadaw has been reluctant to yield meaningful political power. The coup

could have been a business decision made in the boardroom rather than the war-room by the upper echelons of the military who feel threatened by Suu Kyi's continued popularity which could potentially lead to a campaign against corruption and further constitutional change. Suu Kyi and her NLD have tried to re-model the military-dominated economy by implementing the 'Myanmar Sustainable Economic Development Plan' which welcomes foreign investment but could bring the hegemony of the military clique to an end.

Who knows what might happen? Information still remains mainly limited to hearsay and guesswork. What we do know is that the NLD collaboration with the Tatmadaw led to garment workers on strike being attacked in 2018 and union activists in May 2020 being arrested. Suu Kyi calculated that Burmese Buddhist nationalism was a winning electoral strategy. Ethnic minorities represent around 40 percent of Myanmar's total 54 million population. But around 2.5 million ethnic minority citizens were unable to vote in last year's election — including 1.5 million voters in conflict-affected areas due to security concerns and one million Rohingya who are denied citizenship and voting rights. Political democracy in its current shape has not served Myanmar's ethnic minorities, but it's still better, even in an illiberal form, than Tatmadaw rule, a hybrid civil-military system which protects military dominance. The previous political reforms were orchestrated by the

country's military in ways that safeguard its own power interests. This explains the persistence of authoritarian rule and military dominance in contemporary Myanmar politics.

And because the global economic system was interested in profiting from Myanmar's economic potentials, its largely untapped natural riches — including minerals, natural gas, and hydropower and an undeveloped market - it presented ideal commercial opportunities and so the looming shadows of the generals in the background were conveniently ignored.

Many commentators have excused Aung Sang Suu Kyi's complicity in the oppression of the Rohingya as a sign that she and her party were never really in charge and that she was obliged to compromise her own democratic ideals in a Faustian pact with the army. If true, the lesson is very clear for all to see now — that those who sup with the devil should have a very long spoon.

Critics of socialism say that what has arisen in Myanmar will happen if there is a socialist victory at the polls — those in control of state power won't concede their power. Our answer is that if there exists a majority for socialism the socialist movement will eventually prevail one way or another, sooner or later. The immediate reaction would be strikes and demonstrations and mass disaffection, the same disobedience which we witness happening in Myanmar.

ALJO





ANTI-PUTIN PROTESTS

It's clear who they're against, but what are they for?

What is the significance of the current Russian protests against the Putin regime? Western media have called them 'unprecedented'. That is not so.

Mass protests are a frequent occurrence in Russia, though rarely do they attract much attention abroad. Many give voice to local grievances. This January, for example, residents of Ufa protested (successfully) against a big increase in heating charges. In 2019 there were mass meetings in Moscow against an urban renewal programme that threatened people's homes – meetings larger (so a Russian correspondent tells me) than the anti-Putin protest. However, nationwide protest movements also occur, such as that in 2018 against a 'reform' to raise by five years the age at which people can start to draw a pension (43 percent of Russian men die before reaching the new retirement age).

Even focusing solely on protests organised by the anti-Putin opposition, today's protests are similar in size and geographical scope to those that began in December 2011 and continued into 2012. Those protests were not on a large enough scale to have any chance of toppling the regime, nor are the current protests. They mobilise a much smaller proportion of the population (1 percent at most) than the opposition demonstrations in Belarus did last October (about 5 percent).

Enormous power potential

The Putin regime is not going to collapse any time soon. Its power potential is still enormous. It retains full control over TV – still the medium on which most Russians rely for information – and print media. Oligarchs connected with the regime (independent ones are no longer tolerated) own most of Russia's natural resources and heavy industry. The state bureaucracy and armed forces remain loyal.

True, the regime has reason to be concerned about a gradual long-term erosion of popular support. Younger people have access to a wider range of information through the internet and social media. Tens of millions have watched the opposition video *Putin's Palace*, about the president's luxurious residence on the Black Sea coast.

Polls show that Putin's approval rating has fallen over the last couple of years to about 60 percent, which is considered

too low. This too, however, is not unprecedented. It hovered just above 60 percent from 2011 to 2013. Then in 2014 confrontation with Ukraine bumped it up to 85–90 percent. The annexation of Crimea was especially popular. No doubt the remedy of 'a short victorious war' – first recommended as a means of 'averting revolution' by Tsarist interior minister Vyacheslav Plehve in 1904 – can be applied yet again.

Nature of the 'Putin regime'

But what is this 'regime' that Putin has established in Russia?

The Putin regime is neither a democracy nor an out-and-out dictatorship. It is officially described as a 'guided democracy'. It can be represented as three concentric circles:

- at the core: Putin, his presidential administration and government, and his loyal 'party of power' – United Russia (the opposition calls it 'the party of crooks and thieves');
- the 'intra-system opposition' of parties that accept Putin as president but advocate their own policies within permitted limits. There are at present three such parties: the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), Zhirinovskiy's ultra-nationalist Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and Just Russia, a 'social-democratic' reform party that belongs to the Socialist International;
- the 'extra-system opposition' of parties and groups that oppose Putin, including Navalny's 'Russia of the Future' (formerly the Party of Progress). Refused registration, they operate under duress and are unable to contest elections.

The term 'opposition' is therefore ambiguous. In its broad sense it refers to the intra-system as well as the extra-system opposition, in its narrow sense only to the extra-system opposition.

Uniting the opposition

The political situation in Russia has changed in one significant respect. Nine years ago the extra-system opposition was deeply divided, as we reported in the *Socialist Standard* (Material World, July 2012). The three main components of the movement were Russian nationalists, Western-type liberals, and leftists of various sorts. Opposition rallies were enlivened by verbal and even physical clashes between nationalists on one side and anarchists or gay activists on the other.

These internal conflicts have been resolved, mainly due to the rising influence of so-called 'national democrats' who claim to combine Russian nationalism with Western-type liberalism. Alexei Navalny has played a central role in this development. Leftists have been marginalized within the opposition or have abandoned the movement. A group of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists recently issued a declaration in which they renounce:

'all participation in the political spectacles organised by supporters of the right-wing populist Navalny, sadly renowned for his openly nationalist attacks on immigrants, people from the Caucasus and Jews. Whatever excuses or 'explanations' may be offered, joining in their demonstrations would mean turning into an appendage of one of the political gangs waging a dirty and unprincipled struggle for power' (bit.ly/3phllol).

Since 2019 Navalny has urged his supporters to vote 'smart' – that is, tactically – for the strongest opposition candidate standing in any election, even if that candidate is a 'communist' or one of Zhirinovskiy's people. Tactical voting will tend to strengthen the oppositional character of the intra-system opposition and narrow the gap between the intra-system and extra-system oppositions.

Who is Navalny?

Katya Kazbek in *The Grayzone* says that Navalny is 'first and foremost ... an investigative journalist' who exposes corruption within the Putin regime (bit.ly/3amqo2J). This is certainly the centrepiece of his public activity. However, the investigations on which the anti-corruption campaign relies have for some time been conducted mainly by researchers at his Foundation for Fighting Corruption rather than by Navalny personally. Is fighting corruption an end in itself for Navalny? Or is it an instrument in his bid for power? It is hard to think of any other theme that would be equally effective in bringing diverse elements together in a broad coalition. Who, after all, is in favour of corruption?

This does not mean we can assume that a regime led by Navalny would prove any less corrupt once he came to power. Navalny has himself been convicted for fraud in his business dealings, though he calls the charges 'frame-ups'.

Navalny is not only a public speaker but also a prolific blogger and video star who exploits social media to the full. He has a characteristic ironic style and sense of humour.

What does Navalny stand for?

The cruel treatment of Navalny by the Putin regime has won him much sympathy and admiration. Nevertheless, this should not bias our view of what he stands for.

Navalny's constitutional proposals envision transition from a 'super-presidential' to a 'presidential-parliamentary republic' with an independent judiciary. His economic platform appeals to capitalists who lack close connections to the regime. He undertakes to transform the existing 'twisted' and 'authoritarian-oligarchic model' of 'crony capitalism' into a fully competitive model of capitalism with a level playing field and a strong high-tech sector. He promises to restart economic growth, 'create a well-functioning pension system', move towards an all-volunteer military, reduce crime, improve roads, transfer authority and taxes to the regions and municipalities, and stay out of wars abroad.

Not all of Navalny's slogans seem compatible. For example, is it really possible to 'fight corruption' but also 'trust people'? And how will he fund all his programmes, including a doubling of state spending on healthcare and education, and at the same time cut taxes? He says he will do this by reducing



spending on the security services and 'bureaucracy' – but that is easier said than done. Although he criticizes the extreme inequality of wealth in Russia, he does not back Just Russia's demand to replace the current flat-rate income tax (13 percent) by a progressive tax (though he does want to make the property tax more progressive).

Closer examination suggests that not all of Navalny's promises should be taken at

face value. He highlights a promise to establish a minimum monthly wage of 25,000 rubles (£242.50 or \$325), but further on we learn that this is a goal to be achieved by stages, the pace to be set by regional governments (bit.ly/3rQmzIW).

It is difficult to assess Navalny because he is such a master at projecting different versions of himself at different audiences (an essential skill of any good politician). Facing west, he poses as a champion of human rights and condemns Russia's 'aggression against Ukraine'. But he is unwilling to give Crimea back to Ukraine. And he shares Russian nationalist ideas that militate against full recognition of Ukraine's sovereignty – the perception of Russians and Ukrainians as constituting a single nation and the concept of a 'Russian World' that extends to Slav areas beyond state borders but does not encompass the Northern Caucasus, which he proposes to sever from the Russian Federation.

Dehumanizing ethnic minorities

Most alarming, however, is the internal aspect of Navalny's nationalism. Of course, the Putin regime itself is nationalistic. But Putin's is a state nationalism. Navalny's is primarily an ethnic Russian nationalism. He demands the full assimilation of ethnic minorities: those who wish to live in Russia 'must become (ethnically) Russian in the full sense'.

Navalny's main targets have been the Moslem immigrants from Central Asia (above all, Tajikistan) and the Caucasus. They originally came to Russia to earn some money and return home, but increasing numbers have settled in Russian cities, where they have been allowed to build mosques. Even though they do the hardest and dirtiest jobs, they are widely hated and abused. Their position resembles that of Hispanic immigrants in the United States. Like Trump, Navalny has taken full advantage of anti-immigrant sentiment.

In April 2017 Shaun Walker interviewed Navalny for *The Guardian*. To quote Walker:

'Several years ago, he released a number of disturbing videos, including one in which he is dressed as a dentist, complaining that tooth cavities ruin healthy teeth, as clips of migrant workers are shown. In another video, he speaks out in favour of relaxing gun controls, in a monologue that appears to compare migrants to cockroaches.

I ask him if he regrets those videos now, and he's unapologetic. He sees it as a strength that he can speak to both liberals and nationalists. But comparing migrants to cockroaches? 'That was artistic license,' he says. So there's nothing at all from those videos or that period that he regrets? 'No,' he says again, firmly' (bit.ly/3pe0YZf).

Another example of Navalny's dehumanization of ethnic 'enemies' came during the 2008 invasion of Georgia, which he enthusiastically supported. Indulging in a play on words, Navalny called Georgians (*gruziny*) rodents (*grizuny*).

Russia in Western media

We can conclude by agreeing with the remarks of Katya Kazbek concerning how Western media cover events in Russia (as well as in other countries regarded as adversaries of the West). 'The overwhelming majority of Western journalists,' she observes, 'are busy communicating their own narrative, which does not have anything to do with the real situation on the ground' but 'too often reflects the opinions' of NATO governments. It is therefore 'misleading and dangerous to judge Russia by what you hear most often about it'.

STEFAN

Bloody Monday! Not a Sunday night expostulation over the prospect of another working week, but a reference to 9 March, 1761. Two hundred and sixty years ago 50 or so men and women were killed and over 300 wounded in the market square in Hexham, Northumberland.

Ask most people for an example of Crown (state) brutality in the period of the burgeoning industrial revolution and they will cite St. Peter's Fields, Peterloo, in Manchester, that quite rightly was written into the annals of infamy. However, it was not the first, nor the last, confrontation between the authorities and working people.

The specific issue in the 1760s was a form of conscription known as balloting. This had nothing to do with elections and certainly not democracy. The Militia Act had been passed through parliament to boost the said military force to free up and support the army heavily engaged in the 'Seven Years War' (1754-63).

Potential militia recruits were to be identified and those whose names were then drawn from this census had, by law, to serve. The North East of England was nominated as the first area in which to begin this process, with Hexham one of the main centres.

9 March, 1761 was to be the initial enlistment day and rumblings of discontent had been gathering force throughout the preceding weeks. Conscious that opposition might be rather more than just grumbling, local magistrates brought a detachment of the North Yorkshire Militia into Hexham and deployed them in front of the Moot Hall.

Before them protesters gathered in huge numbers in the market square, drawing widespread support from many local parishes as well as the town itself. It was at this point that the gathering officially became a riot.

This is not to say an actual riot with violence towards



**Chartist Meeting,
Kennington Common
1848**

persons or property was taking place, although the crowd was undoubtedly vociferous and menacing. The magistrates read The Riot Act, which instructed the crowd to disperse by law.

The assembled did no such thing and thus, officially, became rioters. They did nothing to dispel this notion, instead they advanced, many bearing staves, on the bayonets protecting the Moot Hall. In that febrile atmosphere, two militia men were shot with their own weapons. The magistrates panicked and gave the order to fire.

When the gunpowder smoke cleared, so had the market square, leaving the dead and seriously wounded. Reports at the time noted that many of the militia men were visibly shocked by the consequences. This did not prevent the authorities seeking out and arresting many of those who got away on the day.

260 years later there are still lessons to be drawn from events such as this one. Those who advocate the necessity for the violent overthrow of the capitalist state would do well to reflect on such incidents. If a crowd superior in numbers can be dealt such a dreadful blow with muskets, how much worse with modern automatic weapons.

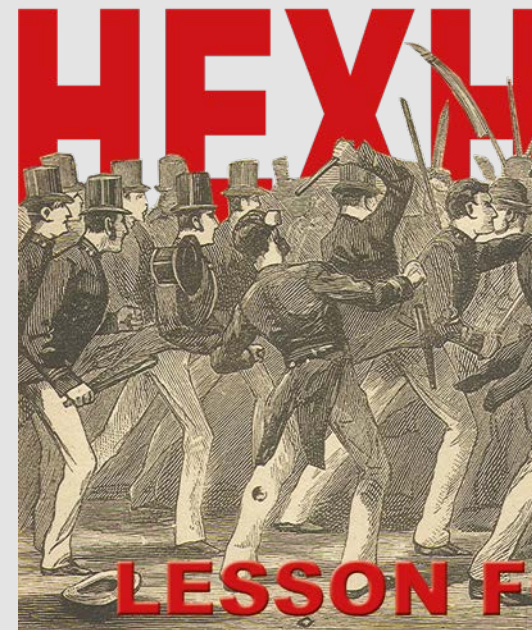
Flying police squads

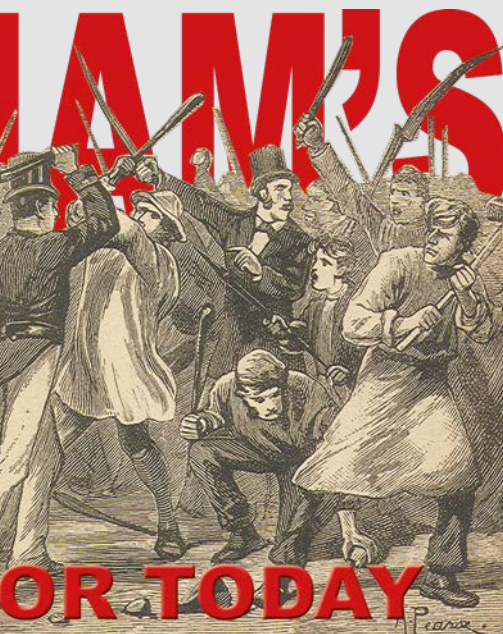
The deployment of a militia force from a different region was, in principle, utilised during the miners' strike (1984-5) when police were brought from non-mining areas into the coalfields. The state has long since recognised the greater efficiency of its coercive powers when applied via forces deficient in local sympathies.

It also a dramatic confirmation of the importance of democracy, however imperfect it may be under capitalism. The Hexham 'rioters' had no means by which to pursue their grievance or exercise choice. Confrontation would have seemed their only option as they could not challenge, or change, the law used against them.

Collective expressions of outrage, such as that gathering in Hexham, are essentially reactive, an expression of weakness. The best that could have been hoped for was a return to the status quo. A forced repeal of The Militia Act might have inconvenienced the Crown in the short term, but was no real threat to its actual authority.

Had the ballot system been stopped at that point, life for those assembled would have simply gone back to the way things





were. There would have been no forward movement, politically, economically or socially. This is the way with all immediate, pragmatic demands, even when initially met.

The state, to this day, continues to enact and employ laws to the advantage of capitalism against the interests of the vast majority, the working class. But

only for as long as the working class chooses to tolerate this state of affairs. It is within the means of the working class to not only challenge, but take control of the state away from the capitalist class.

There is a danger to the state of over-reacting; the seeming solution to a local problem can become a national, and persisting difficulty if a general perception of unfair or brutal treatment develops. For all the repressive apparatus available, the Warsaw Pact states, and eventually the Soviet Union itself, could not assuage popular discontent.

It is also the case that it's not enough to secure what turns out to be a Pyrrhic victory when the result is a case of 'the state is dead, long live the state'. The bureaucrats become oligarchs and capitalism continues along its (not so) merry way.

What history shows

There are those of a radical bent who might argue the tragic outcome in Hexham is a demonstration of the need for a disciplined body to covertly organise rebellion. However, history does not hold much promise for such a notion.

Nearly sixty years after the Hexham 'riot', one year after Peterloo, such a clandestine operation occurred in the West Riding of Yorkshire. There had been a number of radical working men's clubs established in the West Riding and Lancashire, some of their leading lights being ex-Luddites. Many a plan was drawn up with Huddersfield being an initial target for insurrectionists.

Barnsley's Union Society was one such club with around 600 members. The Society received word that an assault on Huddersfield was scheduled for 12 April. The plan was for Barnsley men to go and join a bigger assembly at the village of Grange Moor, close by Huddersfield.

Through the night of the 11-12th approximately 400 men from Barnsley marched to a beating drum with banners bearing political slogans and carrying pikes and guns. At Grange Moor they met not with the expected thousands from across the Riding and Lancashire, but 20 or so radicals from Huddersfield. Aware of a military presence in the town, panic ensued resulting in a disorderly dispersal and the abandonment of weapons and banners. Seventeen were eventually arrested.

Years later Chartists who were sympathetic to the idea of physical force had their ardour cooled by General Napier's invitation to some of their leaders to witness a display of

cannon fire. The romance of violent revolution soon gives way faced with the grim realities of actual combat.

The British state has learned these lessons over two hundred years and more. If there is an instance of over-reaction, Bloody Sunday for example, first allow time to pass. Then set up a public enquiry, hold some official of the time responsible – all the better if he has died in the meantime or can resign from some prestigious post – and even offer an apology, possibly with compensation, but not too much.

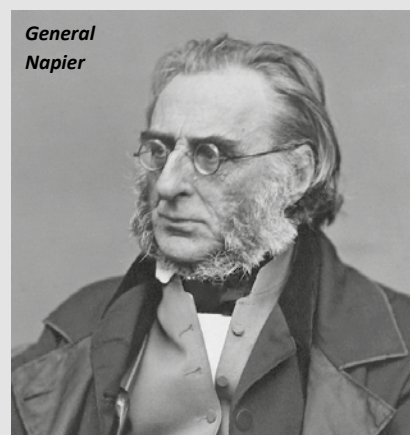
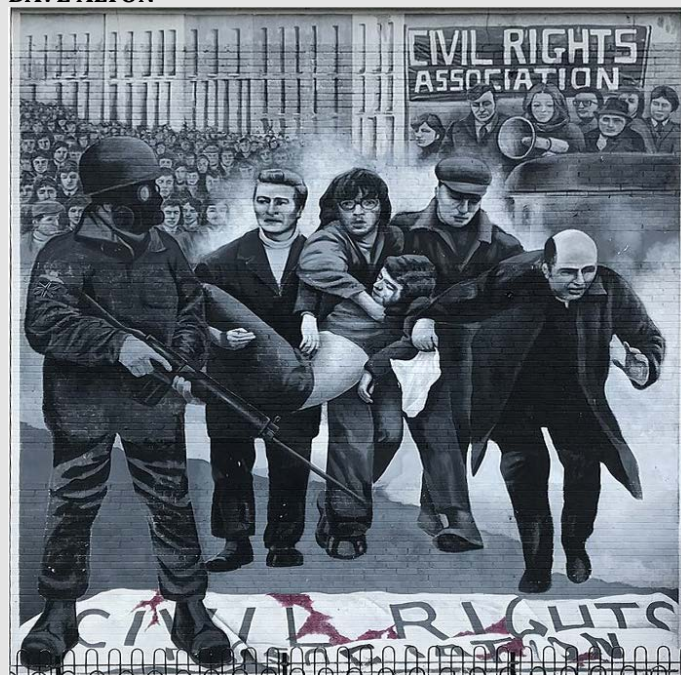
Appearances are thus maintained, while the dead and injured slip away into the history books, the rule of law preserved. The state protects itself to protect capitalism and will continue to do so until the working class decides otherwise.

There was one positive factor to be found in the immediate aftermath of the Hexham debacle - the reports that the militia troops were shocked by the results of their actions. Socialists know that military men and, these days, women may be trained to kill, but are not inured to the results, as so many cases of PTSD indicate.

Also, despite being the coercive arm of the state they are workers, from working-class families. When the working class collectively decide they will democratically replace capitalism with socialism, soldiers are not going to be unaffected.

As the Hexham magistrates knew, they couldn't rely on the local militia to confront their own neighbours so had to bring in others from elsewhere. When the socialist movement becomes worldwide, as it must to achieve socialism, there won't be an elsewhere to draw soldiers from.

DAVE ALTON



General Napier

Who benefits from lower ‘Third World’ wages?

We conclude our series refuting the view that workers in the developed capitalist parts of the world exploit workers living in the ‘Third World’.

Third Worldist ‘anti-imperialism’ basically contends that the interests of workers in the Global North are objectively aligned with the capitalists there in seeking to perpetuate the ‘super-exploitation’ of the Global South. Allegedly, this super-exploitation has the effect of raising these workers above the status of an exploited class by enabling them, via a process of ‘unequal exchange’, to receive the full value of their labour contribution.

As Jason Hickel explains:

‘It was the Egyptian economist Samir Amin – a well-known critic of neo-colonialism – who first articulated this argument in the 1970s. He noticed that that if we look at the labour that goes into producing goods for trade between the south and north, we see that workers in the south are paid much less than their northern counterparts – even when adjusted for productivity or units of output per hour. This means that when the north buys goods from the south, they pay far less than those goods would otherwise be worth. In other words, the north effectively siphons uncompensated value out of the south’ (*Guardian*, 18 May 2017).

While this explanation might seem superficially plausible, there is an intrinsic problem (as we saw last month) with trying to quantify the magnitude of this global transfer of value – let alone quantify the extent to which workers, as opposed to capitalists, in the north allegedly benefit from this transfer – due to value being based on the elusive notion of ‘abstract labour’. Hence the use of price as a surrogate measure. But while the sum of all values must equate with the sum of all prices, for any given commodity, value and price must necessarily diverge under conditions of disequilibrium resulting from the continual adjustment of supply and demand to each other.

Take the commodity, labour power – the skills the worker sells to the capitalist. Its price is the wage that worker receives. However, this transaction is conditional upon the capitalist expecting to make a profit by employing the worker. A business is not a charity. It is not concerned with the wellbeing of its workforce as such. Competition between businesses pushes such sentiments aside and imposes on all the overriding need to secure a profit.

Without profit the business risks being bankrupted. This is as true in the Global North as in the Global South and it is surely significant that the overwhelming bulk of capital – even foreign direct investment – originating in the North is invested there and not in the South. That wouldn’t happen without the prospect of profit.

Profit is the money form of the economic surplus the worker produces in exchange for a wage. She produces more value than she receives in her wage. Hence she is ‘exploited’. It doesn’t matter whether she is ‘well paid’ or not. Whether she can ‘purchase the product of ten hours of another worker’s labour through one hour of her own’ as Zac Cope puts it, is simply not relevant (*Divided World Divided Class: Global Political Economy and the Stratification of Labour Under Capitalism*, 2012, p.173) Her means of purchasing that product – her wage – is conditional upon her producing a surplus for her employer in the first instance and, thus, being exploited.

Wage levels and the rate of exploitation

What determines the ‘rate of exploitation’ cannot simply be inferred from the level of wages paid to workers; it must take into account, also, their productivity. Paradoxically, higher paid workers can be subject to a higher rate of exploitation if the ratio of the surplus they produce compared to the size of their wage packet is higher than in the case of a low-paid worker. However, this can change if you reduce the wages of the low-paid worker thereby increasing his rate of exploitation.

Commentators, like John Smith, argue that depressing wages below their value in the Global South – super-exploitation – is now the primary mechanism under capitalism for increasing the rate of exploitation (*Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century*, 2016). Capital is highly mobile today while labour, hemmed in by national borders, is relatively immobile. This obstructs the equalisation of international wage rates (but not the equalisation of profit rates whereby surplus value is siphoned out of the Global South). Multinational corporations can play one poor country off against another in their quest for lower production costs while a corrupt ‘comprador bourgeoisie’ running these countries assists in this race to the bottom by imposing political repression and banning trade unions.

This argument has merit but, still, we cannot overlook differential rates of productivity. According to Hickel:

‘Southern workers are probably at least as productive since these days many of them work in foreign-owned factories (think of Apple’s iPad factories with highly efficient technology and rigid Taylorist rules, designed to extract as much as possible from every movement).’

Clearly, this is just cherry-picking. The vast majority of Southern workers don’t work in foreign-owned factories. Some do and, doubtless, productivity in these cases matches Western levels. But you have to look at the situation across the country as a whole to get a more realistic picture.

Even in an emerging industrial powerhouse like India, the formal sector accounts for only 10 percent of the workforce, the rest working in the informal sector. Globally ‘a staggering 2 billion workers are in informal employment, accounting for three in five (61 per cent) of the world’s workforce’ (ILO, *World Employment Social Outlook: Trends 2019*).

These are overwhelmingly concentrated in the Global South. Given the paucity of formal sector jobs and the lack of unemployment benefits, workers here often have little option but to eke out a living in the low-paid informal sector. This is characterised by rampant ‘underemployment’ and relatively inefficient small-scale ‘involutionary’ forms of activity.

There is some truth in Hickel’s claim that ‘wages are not somehow naturally low in the south – they have been made low by design. Wages are an effect of power’. But his explanation is incomplete. The bargaining power of those workers is, in turn, undermined by the depressing effect on wages caused by mass unemployment and, even more, underemployment, which is much more pronounced in the South.

The much larger ‘industrial reserve army’ also helps to explain the persistence of generally more labour-intensive forms of production there and, by extension, the significantly lower per capita productivity. According to the ILO there is a strong correlation between output per worker and international variations in wage rates (bit.ly/2OhfIK2).

Indeed, Marx himself maintained that ‘The more productive



is because the capitalists there can 'afford' to pay their workers higher wages to buy these goods which presumably means they are making a profit by employing them.

Who benefits from lower import prices?

Wages, being the price of labour power, will tend to adjust to changes in the prices of other commodities. Cheapening the price of imports into the North by intensifying the exploitation of Southern workers will not materially benefit workers

one country is relative to another in the world market, the higher will be its wages as compared with the other' (Theories of Surplus Value, Ch. 8). Key to this is raising the 'organic composition of capital' via mechanisation thereby bringing about a fall in the rate of profit.

Ironically, Cope himself contends that 'the capitalist system has been able to maintain itself in recent decades' only because, among other things, 'industrialisation of large parts of the Third World have ensured the entry of millions of (super-)exploited workers into the global workforce. This has undoubtedly raised the rate of profit by reducing the rate of growth of the organic composition of capital' (ibid p.201). So he is effectively conceding that production there is more labour-intensive and we can assume this means less productive in per capita terms.

There is a further point to consider. As we saw earlier, part of Cope's argument rests on the claim that most Northern workers are 'unproductive' in the sense that they do not produce, but are financed out of, surplus value. But what of the Global South? While some workers in the small formal sector could be classed as unproductive – for example state employees – in the much larger informal sector the predominant form of labour – 70 percent in sub-Saharan Africa – is 'self-employment and unpaid family work'. Strictly speaking, this does not constitute productive labour either since it does not involve what Marx called the 'exchange of capital for labour' which is a precondition for such labour being considered 'productive'.

However, to reiterate – being 'unproductive' does not mean not being exploited. 'Being exploited' does not depend on you being directly involved in producing surplus value but rather on your functional contribution to a wider system of surplus extraction.

Furthermore, even if 80 percent of the world's productive labour is 'performed in the Third World by workers earning less than 10% of the wages of First World workers', as Cope claims, one should bear in mind that at least 80 percent of the world's population lives in the Third World anyway.

As for workers there earning less than 10 percent of the wages of First World workers we need to relate this to international differences in price levels. In this regard, the position of Third Worldists comes across as muddled.

On the one hand, we find Cope suggesting that workers in the Global North benefit from the ultra-cheap prices for goods produced by super-exploited workers in the Global South; on the other we are told by him that 'as soon as these goods enter into imperialist-country markets, their prices are multiplied several fold, sometimes by as much as 1,000%' (p. 159). This

in the North. Actually, if anything, it has induced capitalists to outsource production to the South and close down factories in the North at the expense of northern workers.

Like water finding its own level wages will ultimately tend to gravitate towards the value of labour power. Marx's observations on the early nineteenth-century struggle to repeal the Corn Laws which restricted food imports to boost domestic prices are pertinent here:

"The English workers have very well understood the significance of the struggle between the landlords and the industrial capitalists. They know very well that the price of bread was to be reduced in order to reduce wages, and that industrial profit would rise by as much as rent fell' (bit.ly/2LvHt0p).

While it is undeniable that there are marked differences in wage rates between the North and South there are some suggestions that the gap may be closing. A report in the Economist noted that while wage growth in the advanced countries has been slight or stagnant: "The crucial change that has taken place over the past decade or so is that wages in low-cost countries have soared' (19 January 2013). Ironically this has encouraged a limited 'reshoring' of manufacturing back to the US where wage stagnation has made US manufacturing slightly more competitive.

Of course, we are still quite a long way off from the 'equalisation of international wage rates' but current developments seem to be tending in that direction. In Asia, for example, wages have been growing annually nearly ten times faster than in the world's richest nations (Nikkei Asian Review, 28 November 2018).

Moreover, if you apply 'purchasing power parity' exchange rates to reflect the varying costs of buying an identical basket of goods in different countries, the gap between rich and poor countries narrows considerably. Cope himself notes that 'according to calculations based on data compiled by the Union Bank of Switzerland, OECD wages have an average 3.4 times more purchasing power than non-OECD wages' (p.163).

This is far less than the cited ratio of 1:11. This difference can be adequately explained in terms of factors already discussed such as differential productivity rates. But compared to the difference in purchasing power between capitalists and workers everywhere in the world, it is pretty negligible.

It is this fundamental class division that the proponents of Third Worldist 'anti-imperialism' wilfully obscure in their pointless pursuit of a reactionary nationalist agenda in an age of global capitalism.

ROBIN COX

Externalities and British Chicken

Externality – a consequence of an economic activity which affects other parties without this being reflected in market prices (Oxford Concise English Dictionary)

British chicken – annually the UK slaughters a billion chickens, about fifteen per person per annum. (Bureau of Investigative Journalism)

In effect an externality means acquiring something at a price lower than necessary if negative effects were to be avoided or compensated for. A few common examples include such acts as taking occupied land for other uses without agreement or full compensation; poisoning air, water or food of local inhabitants near mines, factories and industrial agricultural sites; habitat destruction for industrial use; carbon offsets by which companies in the richer countries pay for CO² pollution caused by them by funding reforestation and similar green projects in other countries. So let's look here at just one aspect of the UK's involvement with some of these externalities connected to the rearing of these millions of chickens in Britain recently highlighted by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

The link begins between the giant corporation Cargill and a little heard of, but vast area, the Cerrado in Brazil which is being deforested at an alarming rate for the mass production of soya beans. Some 100,000 tonnes of these soya beans are used to feed those millions of British chickens each year. The Cerrado is a vast tropical savannah hugely significant for its capacity to store carbon dioxide. It is a crucial part of South America's water system and home to many indigenous communities and endangered animals. It is an area smaller than the Amazon but has far weaker protections. Between 2008 and 2012 the rate of forest loss in the Amazon slowed by 67 percent whilst the Cerrado forest continued to disappear at an alarming rate. There, in the decade to 2018, 95,000 sq km of land was lost, 66 percent more than the Amazon which is three times its size. It now has only half of its original cover. The Cerrado region is estimated to account for 90 percent of soya-driven deforestation in Brazil. Covering more than 20 percent of Brazil's land size it is a huge carbon sink, critical for eight of Brazil's twelve river basins and is integral to the hydroelectric power plants producing 80 percent of Brazil's electricity.

A Dutch NGO 'Aidenvironment' has confirmed vast deforestation and fires on land used or owned by Cargill suppliers in the Cerrado, and that the already huge area of monoculture soya is growing rapidly alongside land-grabs and violence.

In August 2020 a Bureau of Investigative Journalism team tracked a bulk tanker carrying soya beans from Cargill and two other companies in the region from a port near the Cerrado to Cargill's soya plant in Liverpool. Here the beans were processed at Cargill's soya crushing plant and from there to Cargill's poultry feed mills in Hereford and Banbury where a mixture of the soya with wheat and other ingredients is produced. This UK Cargill facility operates under the name of Avara, a joint enterprise with British producer Faccenda. Avara supplies chickens to McDonalds, Asda, Lidl and Nando's whilst also being the largest fresh chicken supplier to Tesco.

Annually the UK slaughters a billion chickens – about 15 per person, which accounts for about 60 percent of the UK's imported soya consumption. Probably an externality little known or thought about?

Regarding deforestation it is possible that a UK company may have a declaration of no trade with companies involved

in illegal deforestation but in this instance, and as an example, Brazil has widespread *legal* deforestation. Then, regarding the soya supply chain between Brazil and the UK, Cargill admit that their 2010 commitment to eliminate deforestation by 2020 has not been met, and now extends it to 2030 – which experts say is too late on the global warming agenda.

In 2006 there was a ban imposed by traders and international NGOs on felling trees in the Amazon for soya production, but no such agreement for the Cerrado. As a result, it is now beef production that drives the deforestation of the Amazon, both legal and illegal, whilst soya accounts for the fast-growing deforestation of the Cerrado.

More examples

This is just one example of the spider's web-like tangle between a commodity and an externality. When looked at in depth it seems the globe is an extensive minefield of externalities. How much effect can just one community of the millions of communities around the world have on their own particular problem? Consider some of the many negatives experienced by local communities in wildly different circumstances and environments from the Arctic to the Sahara, east to west, north to south. Faster melting ice, increasing wild fires, severe weather problems, inundation of low lying farmland and islands, filthy air from excessive traffic, industries and coal burning for electricity causing severe health problems; rivers poisoned by industrial and agricultural waste; overuse of pesticides and herbicides especially in intensive farming causing severe species decline; massive ocean pollution, especially plastics; microplastics, heavy metals and poisonous chemicals found in urine samples in all ages of populations around the world. We are mostly steered away from knowing about such problems, let alone *thinking* about them, by corporations using enormous amounts of money on advertising to draw us in to the many benefits of buying, using, eating and showing off their products.

The divisions between populations around the world, whether nationalism, racism, politics, or economic status, are not natural events. They have been deliberately forged over long periods of time by the powerful sectors seeking their own interests and profits whilst creating wedges between each country's workers. Workers forced into competition with each other to keep their share of the market, their share of employment, their chance of a decent wage and subsequently blaming the other for unfairness and inequality. So where does the responsibility lie? Do we stop eating chicken? How many more of the thousands of examples like this could be brought to our attention?

Without widespread understanding of at least some of the myriad connections – agricultural methods, global distribution chains, reporting of international agreements re carbon capture and carbon credits payments, the very structure of the capitalist system - how are all these diverse and far-flung populations supposed to understand that what they are eating, wearing, driving, buying and using could be damaging other populations, environments and the world itself? What is desperately required is a global solution without all these conflicting and competitive issues. The vast majority of the global population share the brunt of all the basic problems as their interests are not those of the ruling elites and corporations. Those in control of the system continue to keep us in check but we the people have to wake up to the realisation that the future is in our hands.

JANET SURMAN



Anoushka Alexander writes: Suhuyini Nbang-Ba, socialist activist, journalist and teacher died at home in the Gambia on 16 September 2020. He was nine days short of his sixty-first birthday and is survived by a brother, a sister, three nieces and four nephews.

Suhuyini was born in the small town of Ejura, near Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. He was, however, a Dagomba, a member of the Muslim tribe of that name from Ghana's Northern Region. He was originally named Mohammed Yacabou, and known as M.Y. to his friends, but chose the name Suhuyini Nbang-Ba in later life. This was a political act reclaiming his ancestry and history — his Muslim name could be traced back to colonisation of the Dagomba area by traders between the 12th and 15th centuries. Instead, Suhuyini chose a name in his mother tongue, Dagbani — 'Suhuyini' meaning 'unity' (literally 'one heart') and 'Nbang-Ba' meaning 'I know them' — a reference to his ancestors and the act of reclaiming them embodied in changing his name. In fact, having previously been very religious and renowned for his piety, as a young man in the early eighties he renounced Islam and publicly denounced both the activities of certain Muslim leaders and religion in general.

As a schoolboy, Suhuyini was sent to live with his aunt in the north so he could attend Tamale Secondary School. He was also educated at the prestigious University of Ghana, Legon, where he took his undergraduate degree and then later began an MPhil in African and European history. While at university, he became very active politically and was a member of the United Revolutionary Front (URF), an underground anarchist movement opposed to the military junta led by Jerry John Rawlings. However, Suhuyini later opposed armed struggle. During his time as an undergraduate, he was beaten up by the military, hospitalised and placed under house arrest due to the student union's opposition to the military junta.

Suhuyini then spent two years as a teacher back in the Northern Region, also setting up a self-help association for impoverished women and a drama troupe.

In the late eighties, when the ruling regime introduced District Assemblies to lend a semblance of democracy to the dictatorship, Suhuyini contested the Nalung Constituency seat and won 75 percent of the vote. He became one of the first members of the Tamale District Assembly (a sort of district parliament.)

After his time in the north, Suhuyini returned to Accra to take his MPhil. While studying for this he joined the communist *Weekly Insight* newspaper as a reporter and columnist; the *Insight* was at that time the only non-

governmental newspaper. His column was titled 'The Dark File' and targeted corrupt government officials. As he did not use a pseudonym, he started receiving anonymous threats from the top echelons of Ghanaian society and from hit-men of the military dictatorship. Despite this he continued his political work.

When he could stand the threats no longer, and when the military turned up at his home while he was out, he fled on foot to the Gambia, having to sell the very shoes he was wearing to pay for his passage and to bribe border guards. Once in the Gambia he continued his teaching and journalism.

During this period, five of Suhuyini's close Gambian friends were rounded up by the military on suspicion of being involved in a failed coup attempt; all of them died while being transported between prisons. Officials claimed at the time that they had died when the car they were in crashed, but the circumstances surrounding the event were suspicious and his fears for his safety led to Suhuyini finally giving up his political journalism in the Gambia.

However, Suhuyini continued his political work by writing for publications based outside West Africa. He became a member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) and contributed articles to the party's journal *Socialist Standard*. He also edited a magazine of the SPGB called *African Socialist* which was later renamed *Socialist Banner*.

At the time of his death Suhuyini was working on a book of essays, despite limited access to a computer and an erratic electricity supply. Although the hospital did not give a cause of death, he had been increasingly weak for a year with little appetite.

I came to know Suhuyini in the late nineties when he was living in Nsawam, Ghana, teaching English literature and French at secondary school and working at the *Weekly Insight*. Here he was known by pupils and teachers alike by yet another name: Afah, a Dagomba word meaning a Muslim teacher. This name had sprung up spontaneously and was indicative of the respect in which his pupils and colleagues held him.

Tellingly, it was not widely known outside his home region that Suhuyini was born into Dagomba royalty. In fact I doubt any of his colleagues in Nsawam knew of this fact. His father was the sub-chief of the tribe and he was the only son of his mother, the tribal queen. However, when Suhuyini became an atheist he also chose not to inherit the chieftaincy and he kept his royal lineage as secret as possible. I only became aware of it myself at the school where we both taught when one of his pupils, also a Dagomba, prostrated herself on the ground

before him as a sign of respect. Suhuyini quickly told her to get up and that she did not need to do this. It was only when pressed by me that he explained the meaning behind her actions, otherwise he would not have mentioned it.

This was typical of the man. There are some people who make a show of espousing socialism in theory, but fall short of its principles in the way they live their lives. This was never true of Suhuyini — his political views were deeply held and stemmed from his character; he *lived* socialist principles. Unlike some of his nominally socialist colleagues in West Africa, he refused to bribe his way into a lucrative post, preferring to remain a poorly-paid teacher with his principles intact. He tenaciously battled depression, ill-health and constant technical problems to work on his political writing, and throughout his life he campaigned tirelessly, experiencing violence and risking death many times for his principles.

More than that, Suhuyini treated everyone he met as an equal and spoke to everybody with the same friendly respect, from the highest born to the most lowly street-seller. While teaching in Nsawam he sponsored a schoolboy through his education, even though the child was no relation, out of pure compassion. He sponsored a child again later in the Gambia, despite his own limited means. When he died in the Gambia, the family where he rented a room told me he had been like a son to his landlady and like a second father to her grandchildren, who knew him affectionately as ‘Baba.’

He certainly had a life-long effect on me. When I first met him I was seventeen, and my discussions with him then and

over the intervening years helped form the political beliefs I still hold today.

Indeed, Suhuyini left his mark on everyone he met. He held strong views, yet was always willing to hear others out — debates never became rows — and with his humanity, sharp wit and easy, infectious laugh he enriched the life of all who knew him, no matter which name they knew him by. He is deeply missed by those he left behind and the world is a lesser place without him.

Suhuyini Nbang-Ba, political campaigner, journalist, teacher and loved one, born 25 September 1959; died 16 September 2020. The articles he wrote for the *Socialist Standard* can be found here: tinyurl.com/7pnwtlba



COOKING THE BOOKS

Capitalism cannot be reset

After the ‘Great Reset’ was proposed last June the only people to take any notice were conspiracists who saw it as a plan by a cabal of world leaders to impose a ‘New World Order’ with the ‘pandemic’ as the first step.

This is nonsense but the proposal to ‘reset’ capitalism is not much better, as is explained in the same way as we would in this extract from a podcast by Peter Joseph on 20 January (tinyurl.com/y2omdvzm).

“The great reset was put forward by Klaus Schwab, the head of the World Economic Forum, if I remember correctly. He started talking about this around the beginning of COVID-19 in early 2020. Here’s what it says on their actual website, ‘To achieve a better outcome, the world must act jointly and swiftly to revamp all aspects of our societies and economies, from education to social contracts and working conditions. Every country from the United States to China must participate, and every industry from oil and gas, to tech, must be transformed. In short, we need a great reset of capitalism.’ Yes, the great reset of capitalism. Which makes no sense at all since capitalism is actually the fundamental problem, affecting sustainability and all other such issues that this great reset professes to address.

I suppose it’s good to see more conversation, especially when it comes to the environment, but the very fact that the limits of debate have been set and that this is really about preserving capitalism, even though they want to create some idealized version of it called stakeholder capitalism, all this simply reveals another well-meaning pro-establishment spasm in the end. No different than all the climate conferences and biodiversity conferences that accomplish nothing because everyone refuses to look at the system structure as the actual problem, the economic system. It’s actually quite comical if you think about it, ‘We want to change the world, but not capitalism.’

And of course this notion of stakeholder capitalism is one from a long line of nonsensical, qualifying adjectives that people amend before the word capitalism to try and pretend like some sub distinction would ever make a meaningful difference. You see all over the place, crony capitalism, responsible capitalism, vulture capitalism, the social entrepreneur. My favorite is conscious capitalism, as if it ever could be given the very nature and incentives of the structure, once again. It doesn’t matter who’s in the positions. It matters what the structural incentives are.

Just to be clear here, this stakeholder capitalism is defined as ‘a system in which corporations are oriented to serve the interests of all their stakeholders. Among the key stakeholders are consumers, suppliers, employees, shareholders, and local communities. Under this system, a company’s purpose is to create long-term value and not to maximize profits, and enhance shareholder value at the cost of other stakeholder groups.’ I’m not even going to address the insurmountable idealism in that vague description other than to say, you can never take the core incentive out of the system if the system remains in any respect or form. It is nonsensical to say that somehow corporations are going to orient themselves respecting everybody in this kind of stakeholder environment and the ecosystem without maximization of profit and hence, exploitation. You can’t have capitalism without exploitation and profit and hence, exploitation. If those things are removed, then you’re in a completely different system by default.

So this great reset thing is just another spasm, a well-meaning joke, a ploy in fact to sort of pretend like we can make capitalism better when all empirical evidence shows that we cannot.”

PROPER GANDER

An Emotional History

ADAM CURTIS'S latest documentary, *Can't Get You Out Of My Head* (BBC iPlayer), is a fascinating watch, weaving together eight hours of archive footage, music and narration, delivered in Curtis's serious, concerned style.

The six-part series describes itself as 'an emotional history of the modern world', telling how fear and paranoia shaped global events since the start of the Cold War. In Britain, this took the form of post-colonial racism and retreating into a romanticised vision of village greens and red telephone boxes. America promoted itself as proudly individualistic, defined against the image of Soviet citizens as a grey, uniform mass. But America's individualists were living in anonymous suburbs, numbed by post-Vietnam anxieties and suppressed by valium, oxycontin and crack cocaine. The brutal regimes in China and Russia replaced their figureheads and spoke of progress, but each new set of rulers operated with the same divisive motivations as their predecessors. The ideologies which propped up society were based on misconceptions and antagonisms, resulting in aggression.

According to Curtis, then came the failure of world leaders to predict the fall of the Soviet Union, and the later realisation of the threat of climate change, which further weakened confidence to explain events using stories or ideologies, unless they were conspiracy theories. Abstract systems were increasingly used to try and rationalise a chaotic world. When computers harvest and process data they can find patterns, but they can't link them together as stories, and therefore meaning is irrelevant. And where data-processing is applied, it's used to watch over, control or manipulate people. So although the technology is new, the aim remains to exercise power.

Curtis's style of film-making counters the data-crunching method, as he follows the personal stories which emerge from our experiences of authority. The characters he chooses to illustrate his points aren't those you'd expect; Margaret Thatcher, for example, only appears briefly to tell us about her preferred way of ironing the hem of a dress. Chinese leader

Mao Zedong takes up much less screen-time than his wife, Jiang Qing, who, like the documentary's other main players, held a pivotal role which might otherwise stay underacknowledged and which expresses wider trends.

Jiang Qing wielded considerable influence during China's 'Cultural Revolution' of the 1960s and 70s, including over state propaganda, and in which enemies of the government and herself were hunted down by the Red Guards militia. Mao turned on Qing, having used her to destroy his opponents. She was one of the Gang of Four, a faction of the Chinese Communist Party who were convicted of treasonous offences soon after Mao's death in 1976. Qing is portrayed as ruthless, ambitious and individualistic, her approach just a reaction against existing power networks without changing anything fundamental. The same applies to Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping with his economic reforms, making it clear by the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 that if China no longer even pretends to believe in democracy what does it believe in apart from money?

The other people featured in the series are mostly radicals and would-be radicals, including Eduard Limonov, Michael X, and Afeni and Tupac Shakur. Through each of their stories Curtis explains how they all set out to challenge those with power, but they revealed old conflicts lurking underneath, fuelled by anger and resentment. And each failed because they couldn't or wouldn't escape from the power structures they knew.

Eduard Limonov was a Russian dissident who lived for a time in a poor neighbourhood in 70s New York, the setting of his novel *It's Me, Eddie*. This argued that people think they are free and living in a democracy, but it's all a sham and we follow the rules set by the money system. Despite this promising view, Limonov slid into believing that nationalism is the way to convey collective strength. So, after returning to Russia he founded the National Bolshevik Party as a grim fusion of fascism and 'communism', with the goal of reawakening oppressive ideas.

Michael de Freitas arrived in London

from Trinidad in 1957. He found work as an enforcer for notorious slum landlord Peter Rachman, and discovered a callousness behind British society. Renamed Michael X, he joined the Black Power movement in Notting Hill. His activism led to him being sent to prison for inciting racial hatred (at the same time as Enoch Powell made his racist speeches as an MP) and when he was released he found that his previous support among white liberals had gone. They had instead turned their energies to setting up community centres, which made Michael believe that now, black people in Notting Hill were being treated as subjects to measure and manage by liberals with their own position to protect. He decided to set up short-lived communes where, Curtis tells us, he reverted to old ways to gain influence he learnt working for Rachman – extortion and violence.

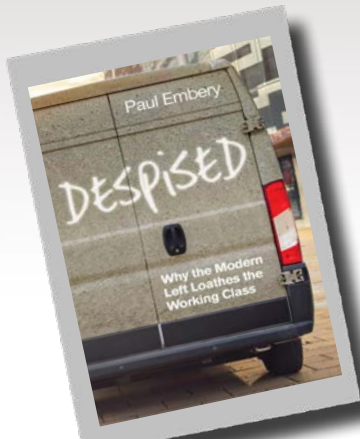
From the mid-1960s, Afeni Shakur was prominent in the New York Black Panthers, a group infiltrated and pushed towards a bombing campaign by undercover police. Her son, Tupac, later aimed to revive the movement through his music. He began by wanting to turn hostility outwards from gang culture to be directed at those who oppress, but ended up being more cynical and self-promoting. According to Curtis, he intensified aggression rather than changing anything, driven by individualism.

As with his prior film *HyperNormalisation* (2016), Curtis argues that lacking a vision of a different, future society holds back real change, both on a personal and collective level. The characters he describes failed because of this, only acting within existing antagonistic frameworks. Unfortunately, Curtis doesn't go into enough detail about what these structures are. He hasn't taken the next step, on screen at least, of directly criticising the economic root causes of power struggles, nor explaining what kind of future society he would advocate. Despite this, and his loose use of the term 'revolution', *Can't Get You Out Of My Head* is refreshingly provocative, and worth getting into your head.

MIKE FOSTER

REVIEWS

Blue Labour



Paul Embery: **Despised. Why the Modern Left Loathes the Working Class.** Polity. 2021. 218pp.

This is a relatively short book but halfway through it I wondered if I could bear reading any more. Why? Well, it's certainly not badly written or hard going. In fact it's written in a congenially informal style that makes it easy to read and understand. But the trouble (or one of its troubles) is that it's endlessly repetitive, simply going over the same ground time and time again, repeating the same polemic and even using the same words to express it.

What does it actually argue? Basically that the Labour Party is finished if it doesn't manage to bring back to its fold the so-called 'red wall' of voters who deserted it in the Brexit referendum and in the 2019 General Election. These are the voters the author identifies as the 'working class' (defined as those who do 'physical labour or work in blue-collar industries, factories, call centres, retail or frontline public services') who have traditionally been the backbone of Labour's support in urban Britain and from which background, as he frequently reminds us, he himself comes.

These people, Embery contends, have moved away from Labour because it has become a Party dominated by a middle-class elite hostile to traditional working-class values and favourable to globalisation, mass immigration and identity politics. According to the author, it needs to move back to embrace and represent those working-class values and only by so doing will it win back that core of traditional support and again become an electoral force. The words he uses to describe those 'values' are among those repeated over and over again

throughout, giving this book its tiresomely repetitive feel: patriotism, tradition, custom, order, stability, flag, family, faith, identity, community, belonging.

Almost equally countless are his repetitions of a particular set of tired, hackneyed terms often used by those on the right of the capitalist political spectrum to seek to vilify their opponents: liberal wokedom, virtue signalling, identity politics, woke left, cosmopolitan elite, progressivism – or more or less any combination of these words. These are the terms he uses to denote forces he sees as standing in the way of those traditional working-class values.

Yet this book is a funny mixture. Its writer is 'a firefighter and trade union activist' and an adherent of so-called 'blue Labour'. He proclaims himself 'left-wing' and makes it clear that he is on the side of the workers in their endeavours to improve pay and conditions. So it can be said that he recognises the struggle for a bigger share of the cake that the capitalist system creates between those who own most of the wealth and those who own little but their ability to work. But his solution is for workers to be represented by a Party, a reformed Labour Party, that tilts things in their direction and opposes the encroachments of global capital on their economic wellbeing. He proclaims himself fiercely pro-Brexit, seeing that vote as an indication that the working class (in his definition) was fed up with the 'shackles of the EU', with the 'woke' culture of Labour's political elite, with the Party's failure to respect workers' traditional culture and values (patriotism, etc.) and with its embrace of 'progressivism', globalisation and 'neo-liberal' economic policies.

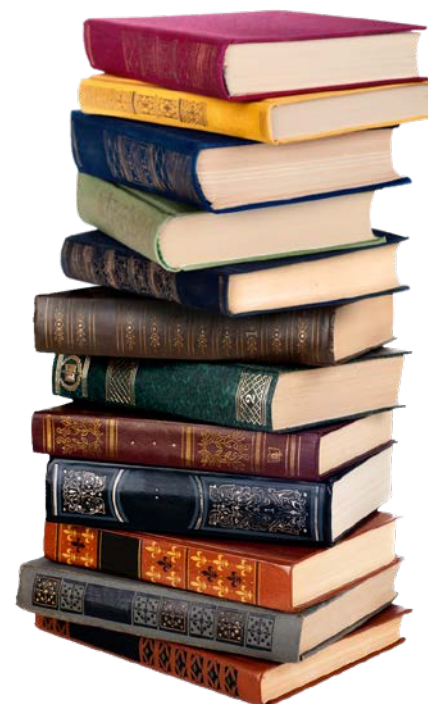
Some of this could be seen as well meaning, but it asks all the wrong questions and buys into a whole range of myths about class, race, the nature of government and much else. Above all it entirely misses the point about the struggle between workers and capitalists. It makes no sense to qualify as working class only those who do manual work or are in lower paid jobs. The reality, as even at one point the author comes close to recognising (but then dismisses), is that all those who sell their energies for a wage or salary are workers. They are all in the same basic position vis-à-vis their employer and all susceptible to losing their employment and so their means of living if the market determines it. No government, left, right or centre, can do much about that even if they would like to, for in the final analysis governments exist to administer the buying

and selling system on behalf of the owners of capital and, even if they are able to take over some aspects of it (as suggested by Embery), they cannot control it, as has been shown time and time again by the continuous ups and downs brought about by what Marx called 'the anarchy of the market'.

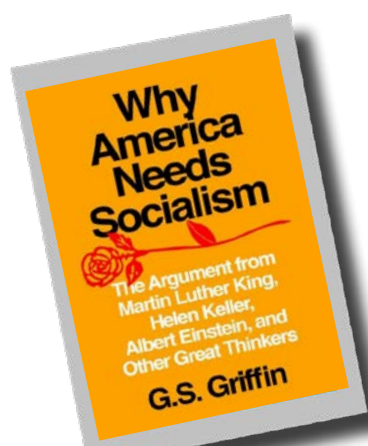
So though the author calls himself 'a democratic socialist' and says he wants 'to address the injustices of the world', his conception of how society should be run is a contradictory mishmash. He advocates a 'strengthening of the nation state', state control of utilities and such like, a government policy of 'jobs for everyone' and economic protectionism, yet at the same time he calls for internationalism, for a 'flourishing private sector' and insists that markets are 'essential to the functioning of a free and democratic society'.

The author proclaims himself a socialist but would do better to look at a more meaningful conception of socialism, one that aims for a world without the market system, without buying and selling, without money or wages, and based on voluntary work, common ownership and democratic control. In such a society the narrow 'cultural' and class differences he sees as fundamental between people of one kind of background and another, between people of one country of origin or another, will disappear and give way to positive cultural diversity and real economic equality based on a system of from each according to ability, to each according to need.

HOWARD MOSS



Not the alternative



Why America Needs Socialism.
By G.S. Griffin. Ig Publishing,
New York, 2019.

It wasn't a bad idea to introduce socialism to Americans prejudiced against it, by quoting people and writers they know of such as Einstein, Martin Luther King, Helen Keller, Mark Twain, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, George Orwell, all of whom made criticisms of capitalism as a system based on inequality and production for profit. Technically, this is the invalid 'argument from authority' but Griffin puts their quotes to good use to back up his argument against capitalism, at least against private capitalism.

The facts he presents are referenced in 70 pages of footnotes. All the same, there are a few inaccuracies. In 1936 the Spanish people did not rise up against the fascist dictator Franco; Franco rose up against the elected Republican government. The Mondragon cooperative had nothing to do with any Marxist tradition in Spain; it was set up under Franco by a Catholic priest.

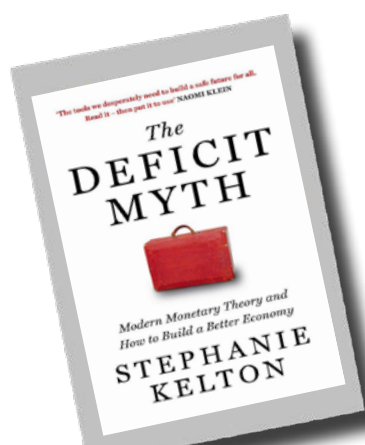
When it comes to describing the alternative to capitalism, what Griffin (a member of the Democratic Socialists of America) sees as socialism, the book fails. He describes socialism as a society 'full of cooperatives'; all places of work – factories, farms, offices, shops, transport, hospitals, schools, colleges, theatres – are to be owned and run by those working in them. This would not be socialism, as in a socialist society the means of life would be owned by society as a whole and not by those who worked in them. Society-wide common ownership allows production to be geared directly to meeting people's needs; the question to solve is then not to sell what has been produced but how to distribute it to where it is needed.

Certainly, in socialism workplaces will be democratically run by those working in them but they won't be their property. Griffin's scheme, on the other hand,

involves worker-owned cooperatives producing for sale on a market, which means that they will have to at least break even, with money spent being balanced by money from sales, while free services will have to be financed from taxes. The objection to this is not that it wouldn't be better than what exists now but that it wouldn't work, at least not as intended. Market forces would still control things and, since in practice the cooperatives would have to aim to make a monetary surplus (aka profit), eventually lead to a return to capitalism as we know it.

ALB

Muddled Money Theory



The deficit myth: modern monetary theory and how to build a better economy, By Stephanie Kelton; John Murray Publishers, 2020. ISBN 9781529352528

You may have read or heard about Modern Monetary Theory (MMT), which has become popular in some left-wing circles as a means for justifying government spending programmes. In essence, it affirms that any state that can issue its own inconvertible (fiat) currency, cannot go bankrupt (so long as it only borrows in its own currency).

This leads to a model of the state in which it is not reliant on taxation nor borrowing to spend. Taxes, for MMT, are merely a means for driving demand for the state-issued currency, and any money paid in tax is effectively destroyed. All state spending is simply the issuing of newly created money. The national debt is simply a different form of money that attracts interest in the normal money the state issues. The national debt, in this model, is merely a means to regulate interest rates.

The only limit to state spending, for MMT, is the availability of resources in the real economy. These limits only become evident through the appearance of inflation: prices would begin to rise as demand from government spending

outstripped supply. The method that Kelton promotes to regulate this spending is a government jobs guarantee scheme, so that full employment is maintained at all times. If private sector employment drops, the government jobs scheme kicks in to offer employment, at a minimum rate. As the economy recovers, people leave the job scheme, attracted by private sector wages.

This is, then, unlike the Keynesian prescription, in that MMT encourages government spending at any stage of the business cycle, rather than cutting spending during the upswing and borrowing during the recession.

The core premise of MMT is banally true: the state can always issue more money in its own currency. There is a question of just how much scope there is for increasing state spending before inflation kicks in, and Kelton certainly seems to write a lot of cheques against that spending capacity: healthcare, university education, pensions, etc.

She seems to imply that the current models, wherein the state is assumed to be funded through taxation and borrowing, are simply an error, rather than representing the ideological form of the interests of the owners of money and capital.

Before 1971 other currencies had a fixed rate of exchange with the dollar and the dollar was convertible into gold at the fixed rate of \$35 an ounce. This provided an indirect link between a currency and gold. The currencies themselves, however, were not convertible into gold and states could issue as much as they wanted. To the extent that they over-issued them this led to inflation and in the end to a formal devaluation of their exchange rate with the dollar.

When this 'gold exchange standard' was abandoned by the US in 1971 the commodity origin of currencies was completely disguised, giving rise to the illusion on which MMT is based that money is entirely a creation of a state. Since then currencies have floated up and down against each other in accordance with the demand for them, for instance to pay for imports. An increase in their supply was still liable, if excessive, to cause inflation. The result wasn't a formal devaluation, simply a downwards float vis-à-vis other currencies.

To an extent, the commodity origin is still relevant because the state monopoly of fiat currency is not absolute. People can abandon pounds or dollars by buying foreign currencies or value-bearing commodities (in a crisis, the price of gold shoots up, as people buy gold to try and protect the value of their assets). Contrary to Kelton's assertion, the banks do not have to buy the national debt, they

have other options, but it has to remain attractive, and the currency has to retain confidence.

Further, her dismissal of ‘crowding out’ theory only goes so far. The usual idea of crowding out is that government borrowing attracts investable capital and pushes up interest rates, making it harder for private sector businesses to find investment and thus damping down overall economic growth. Kelton argues that the state can effectively set its own interest rates for borrowing, and can thus borrow and hold down interest rates at the same time.

To an extent that is true, but only within broad limits governed by general confidence in the security of the government debt. With international money markets, setting the interest rate too low or too high would make the currency a target for speculation, as people would move their assets into or out of the country. Further, leaving interest rates to one side, as the state can only

consume resources (as a state) all the resources employed by the state cannot be employed by private capital to produce profits. Whether this transfer really comes from borrowing, taxation or from creating money is moot, the fact remains that from a capitalist’s perspective, state spending is a threat to their profitability. This means less wealth overall is created for the state to commandeer.

The same can be said for a jobs guarantee. It is useful for Kelton to tell us that the US Federal Reserve sees it as part of its role to deliberately sustain a certain level of unemployment in order to control inflation. While she sees this as the result of mistaken theory, we would see it as part of the essential features of capitalism. Capitalism relies on the lash of the threat of poverty and unemployment in order to sustain its profitability for the capitalists, as well as having a buffer of laid-off workers in reserve for the next boom.

A job guarantee scheme would see wages pushed up to the point where they

cut into the profits the capitalists make (and this would happen without causing inflation, since the demand would simply be transferring effective demand from one pocket to another). This would likely result in a capital strike occasioning a form of economic crisis. Just as likely, the state might be called in, as it was under the Keynesian nostrums, to regulate wages and use its job guarantee to control wage levels.

To the extent that Kelton talks about looking past money to think about real economic resources and how they can be commanded for the interests of the whole community, she is on the right path. The lever of state-issued money is insufficient. The distortion of money markets would get in the way of that. Likewise, simply seeing the problem as a misunderstanding of theory, rather than actual contesting class interests, is a greater barrier than any theory of how the state is financed.

PIK SMEET

50 Years Ago

Marxism in Chile?

Salvador Allende is not the first president of Chile to proclaim himself a revolutionary. When Allende’s predecessor, the Christian Democrat Frei, was elected in 1964 he pledged himself to a ‘revolution in liberty’. Two years later found him sending in the army to break a strike in the copper mines; eight people were killed. As Fidel Castro rather neatly put it: ‘He promised revolution without blood and has given blood without revolution.’

Like Allende, Frei was elected on the strength of his promises to solve two basic problems. Firstly the concentration of land in the hands of a few vastly wealthy families while 350,000 peasants have no land at all. And secondly the domination of Chile’s economy by foreign (mainly American) capital, which is held to be responsible for the chronic unemployment in the country (currently running at about 7 percent) and the destitution of a large section of the population (one half of all families live on less than thirty dollars a month).

(...)

Allende’s Chile, just like any other country operating within the world capitalist economy, will have to compete on the international markets to sell its products. The prices of its commodities can be made competitive only by Chile keeping abreast of world developments in industrial innovation, by constantly reinvesting in new plant — by constantly accumulating capital. And this can be done only by Chile’s industries — whether nationalised or not — pumping surplus value out of the working class. That these ‘external coercive laws’ are continuing to operate was made quite clear in a radio speech by the new President when he announced that daily production of coal is to be stepped up from 3,800 tons to 4,700 tons — and then called on the miners to make sacrifices so that Chile’s coal can be sold at

competitive prices on the world market.

Because the popular front government is responsible for Chile’s capitalist economy, inevitably it is being brought into conflict with the workers and peasants. Already there have been several strikes, some involving the occupation of factories, both in the capital Santiago and in the provinces. In December 1970 telephone workers in Santiago took over the central telephone building and held some hostages, calling for the immediate introduction of new salary scales which the government said it would introduce in time. In the same month three thousand municipal workers stopped work for 48 hours after demanding pay rises which the ‘Communist’ Minister of Finance refused, while fifteen thousand administrative workers were on strike too.

(Socialist Standard, March 1971)



Salvador Allende

Meetings

All Socialist Party meetings/talks/discussions are currently online on Discord. Please contact the Forum Administrator on spgb@worldsocialism.org for how to join.

MARCH 2021 DISCORD EVENTS

Wednesday 3 March

“DID YOU SEE THE NEWS?” 19.30 GMT
General current affairs discussion

Friday 5 March

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK, 19.30 GMT

FAME AND FORTUNE

Speaker: Mike Foster

Celebrity status isn't just reserved for a distant few; thanks to social media and 'reality TV' any of us can have the opportunity to be famous with millions of fans. This widening of the definition of 'celebrity', and also the technological changes in how we consume the media, have been fuelled by what makes the most money. This talk looks at the economic power which celebrity status attracts, and also what this means for both celebs and ourselves.

Sunday 7 March, 18.00 GMT

CENTRAL BRANCH MEMBERS' MEETING

Wednesday 10 March

THE FAQ WORKSHOP, 19.30 GMT

LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP?

Socialists oppose leaders, but what about leadership and do we really understand what it means?

Friday 12 March

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK, 19.30 GMT

TECHNOCRACY: SWERVING A

REVOLUTION (UNLESS WE GET THERE FIRST)

Speaker: Carla Dee

The market system is in chaos and seems no longer fit for purpose, even for the 1%. How will our power structure survive? What's behind our politicians opportunistic pandemic slogans like 'the system's not working' and 'build back better'?

Wednesday 17 March

THE FAQ WORKSHOP, 19.30 GMT

SOCIALIST DESERT ISLAND DISCS

We've talked books, now it's time to talk music. What are the bands and tunes that most inspire socialists? Paul Edwards presents.

Friday 19 March

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK, 19.30 GMT

WHAT IS POST-SCARCITY?

Podcast by Peter Joseph followed by discussion. Many apologists for capitalism are claiming, as they did in the 1960s, that technological developments under capitalism will gradually lead to a society of leisure and abundance. Peter Joseph explains why this won't and can't happen and also looks at what 'post-scarcity' means. Does it mean 'a universal abundance of everything' or the technically efficient, non-wasteful use of resources to satisfy what people need for a healthy life?

Wednesday 24 March

THE FAQ WORKSHOP, 19.30 GMT

7 REASONS WHY YOU SHOULDN'T WATCH 'THE WALKING DEAD'

Box-set bingeing is the new pandemic norm, but what ideological messages are we soaking up as we're stretching out with a beer on the sofa? Here's one fun but insidious example as a case study.

Friday 26 March

FRIDAY NIGHT TALK, 19.30 GMT

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTIONS

Speaker: Andy Thomas

How the digital revolution hit the printing industry and how it swept away traditional craft skills (typesetting, platemaking etc). It demonstrated many of the key features of industrial revolution: destruction of traditional skills and the unionisation that went with it; temporary restoration of the rate of profit; automation and AI increasingly replacing human intervention with implications for accelerating future industrial revolutions (eg the 'lights out' printing plant). Such revolutions also raise many interesting questions about what kind of manual skills might we want to keep in a socialist society and why.

Wednesday 31 March

OPEN MIC NIGHT, 19.30 GMT

A chance for non-members to have a say. We hear from Tony, an anarchist and IWW member, who will give us some thoughts on the syndicalist perspective, followed by discussion.

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.



Court jesters

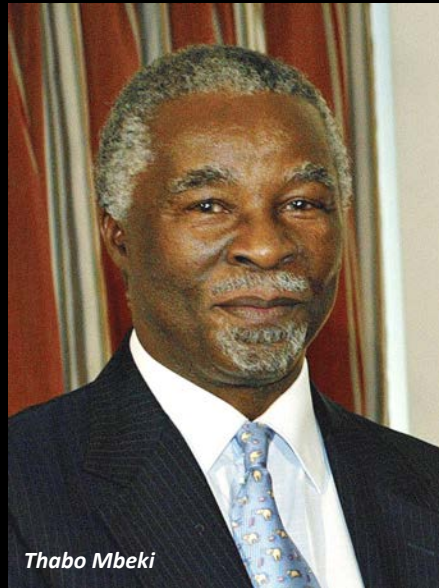
As of 30 January 2021, more than 102 million cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed, and over 2.2 million deaths attributed to the disease. Given that the knowledge and resources exist to reduce the number of epidemics and minimise the possibility of them becoming pandemics, the vast majority of these deaths can be considered premature. Little wonder then that some people think 'It is time to impanel a citizens' tribunal to investigate the utter failure of the governments of Boris Johnson, Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Narendra Modi, and others to break the chain of the infection of COVID-19. Such a tribunal would collect the factual information that would ensure that we do not allow these states to tamper with the crime scene; the tribunal would provide the ICC with a firm foundation to do a forensic investigation of this crime against humanity when its own political suffocation is eased' (counterpunch.org, 22 January). Supporters of this approach take the short-sighted view that the prosecution of a motley crew of misleaders is enough. They are but temporary pustules on the ever-hungry, profit-chasing beast whose tentacles reach across the world.

Master of puppets

The vast majority of the working class fail to see the beast and blindly support capitalism. None of them can escape responsibility for the consequences. For the power wielded by the rulers of world capitalism is a reflection of the political ignorance of the working class everywhere. It is absurd to blame misleaders, particularly those elected by millions of us. The depth of that ignorance was shown recently when after four years as president of USA Inc., the cockwomble Trump received more than 74 million votes. Tanzania's equally odious President Magufuli also got there with our support. It was reported that he recently stated '...that no lockdown was planned because God would protect people from COVID-19 while homespun precautions such as steam inhalation were better than vaccines. 'Vaccines are not good. If they were, then the white man would have brought vaccines for HIV/AIDS,' he said in a speech in western Tanzania, contradicting the global scientific consensus and advice from the World Health Organization (WHO). Tanzania has officially reported a total number of 509 COVID-19 infections and 21 deaths, WHO data shows, but it has not updated the figures for more than six months. 'We Tanzanians haven't locked ourselves in and we don't expect

to lock ourselves down. I don't expect to announce any lockdown because our God is living and He will continue to protect Tanzanians' ...'We will also continue to take health precautions including the use of steam inhalation. You inhale while you pray to God, you pray while farming maize, potatoes, so that you can eat well and corona fails to enter your body. They will scare you a lot, my fellow Tanzanians, but you should stand firm' (yahoo.com, 27 January).

ANC Inc.



Thabo Mbeki

Thabo Mbeki, the former president of South Africa (1999-2008), once compared AIDS scientists to Nazi concentration camp doctors and viewed black people who accepted orthodox AIDS science as 'self-repressed' victims of a slave mentality. He saw the 'HIV/AIDS thesis' as entrenched in 'centuries-old white racist beliefs and concepts about Africans'. Mbeki promoted alternative remedies such as vinegar rather than antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) which saved the state's funds at a cost of up to 365,000 lives. Winnie Mandela to her credit '.. said to president Mbeki: 'Why are ARVs not toxic for the members in Parliament who are taking them but toxic for the poor?'' Members of the 99 percent have also called for him to be tried for crimes against humanity. Others, less myopic, have pierced the miasma of misinformation: 'The working class all over the world have far more in common with each other than they do with the bourgeoisie in business, politics and the media within their own borders. Covid-19 has taken millions from us – but we cannot allow the global bourgeoisie to play their divisive games using nationalism, or narratives of political

catapstrophe to fool us. Let us not side with our countries or one flavour of politician – let us unite in the class war – and let us see through the luxury the political, media, and business bourgeoisie enjoy for what they really are – scared and incompetent' (rt.com, 28 January).

Social justice or socialism?

In an open letter to South Africa's current president, billionaire Cyril Ramaphosa, entitled 'Maybe there should be different laws for the ruling elite and ordinary citizens' (news24.com, 25 January), Dikeledi Molatol, a 'social justice activist', writes: 'Perhaps what should happen, Mr President, is that you and your Cabinet must just consider declaring special laws and regulations for elites and your fellow politicians in the ANC, and different ones to govern us, ordinary citizens. In that way we will stop being under the illusion that we are all equal before the law and all committed to combatting this pandemic.' King Zuma has his palace and shares responsibility for the Marikana massacre with Ramaphosa. Anti-apartheid activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu said of the ANC: 'They stopped the gravy train just long enough to get on themselves.' He went on describe the Zuma administration as 'worse than the apartheid government' and that he would 'pray for the downfall of the ANC.' South Africa today is the most unequal society in the world - economic apartheid persists for millions. How many more presidents will come and go before the billions see that you cannot change the nature of the capitalist beast, and as long as we continue to feed it, war and want, pestilence and famine will persist?



Cyril Ramaphosa