



Science v. superstition

Donald Trump's appointment of vice-president Pence as head of the US response to the coronavirus provoked rage and ridicule from health professionals and others. Pence is a lawyer. Does he expect to stop the virus by serving it a writ?! Socialists here are perhaps for the first time in agreement with Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez: 'Mike Pence literally does not believe in science,' she tweeted... 'It is utterly irresponsible to put him in charge of the US coronavirus response as the world sits on the cusp of a pandemic. This decision could cost people their lives. Pence's past decisions already have,' she said. Ocasio-Cortez reminded people of Pence's credentials for the job: 'While he was governor of Indiana, he oversaw an HIV crisis that was so severe that at its peak, 20 new cases of HIV were diagnosed every week. As governor, Pence's science denial contributed to one of the worst HIV outbreaks in Indiana's history' (theguardian.com, 28 February).



Frederick Douglass

Reform or revolution

Given a choice between a voice of reason Democrat such as AOC and a bible-thumping, science-denying Republican e.g. Pence, who is more deserving of the socialist vote? Neither. Both support capitalism. Science aside, the real question is do we want to end war and want or not? Leftist luminaries, including Noam Chomsky, Barbara Ehrenreich and Michael Albert ignore the lessons of history and support the 'lesser evil'. Their open letter (truthdig.com, 24 January) states '...real solutions require Trump out of office. Real solutions will become far more probable with Sanders or Warren in office...' Slavoj Zizek agrees: '...US political life to be radically reinvented... Sanders is to be unconditionally supported' (rt.com, 11 February). The Sanders 'meantime' must be a capitalist meantime and is no responsibility of those who seek to replace it with a better system. The establishment of socialism depends on a majority of us

More of the same

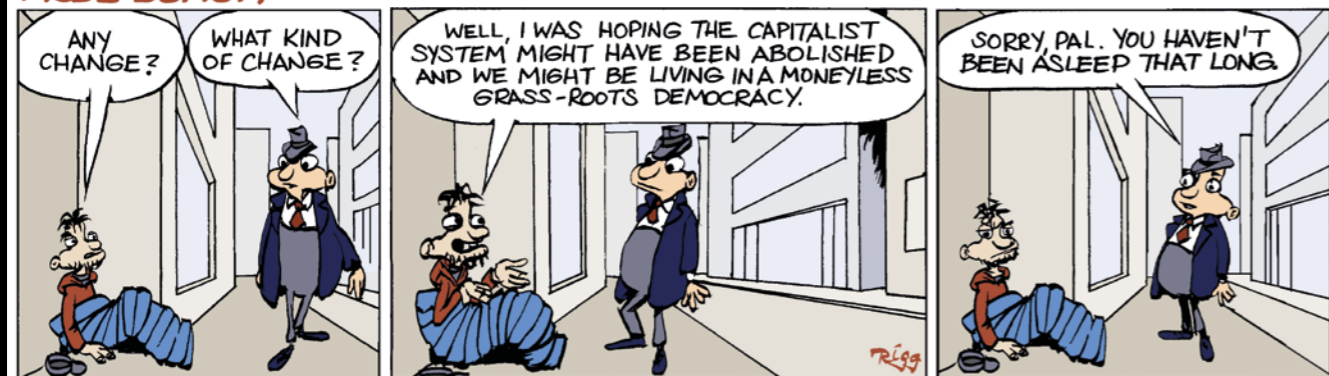
That reformists such as Sanders do not represent a threat to the status quo is confirmed by history and current mainstream comment. 'It should be clear to anyone who is not trying to frighten voters that Sanders is a social democrat...' (marketwatch.com, 11 February). MarketWatch, it should be noted, is an American financial information website that provides business news, analysis, and stock market data. It is a subsidiary of Dow Jones & Company, a property of News Corp, which also owns The Wall

Street Journal and Barron's. Similarly, we read: 'In capitalist mecca Las Vegas, social democrat Sanders cements Democratic front-runner status' (cbc.ca, 23 February). 'Like most Democrats, Kimberly Carr said she'd vote for anyone against Trump. But she wants Sanders. The VIP host at the Bellagio supported Elizabeth Warren, then switched to Sanders on the second ballot in Saturday's caucuses. She said the party needs someone with fire in the belly and bold policy ideas to take on Trump. Eugene Debs knew better: 'The Republican and Democratic parties, or, to be more exact, the Republican-Democratic party, represent the capitalist class in the class struggle. They are the political wings of the capitalist system and such differences as arise between them relate to spoils and not to princi

Then and now

Fifty years earlier, one former slave wrote: 'The difference between the white slave, and the black slave, is this: the latter belongs to ONE slave-holder, and the former belongs to ALL the slave-holders, collectively. The white slave has taken from him, by indirection, what the black slave had taken from him, directly, and without ceremony. Both are plundered, and by the same plunderers' (Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 1855). Today, 'Target Workers Unite recently released a survey of more than 500 Target workers around the US, representing 382 different stores in 44 states. Only 12.7% of the workers who responded said they could survive on the wages from Target alone, with 56% of workers citing they have run out of food while employed at Target, and 12.8% of workers reported experiencing homelessness' ('Target raised wages. Then it cut workers' hours and doubled their workload', theguardian.com, 27 February). Target's annual gross profit for 2019 was \$22.057bn. Post November's presidential election, it will be business as usual.

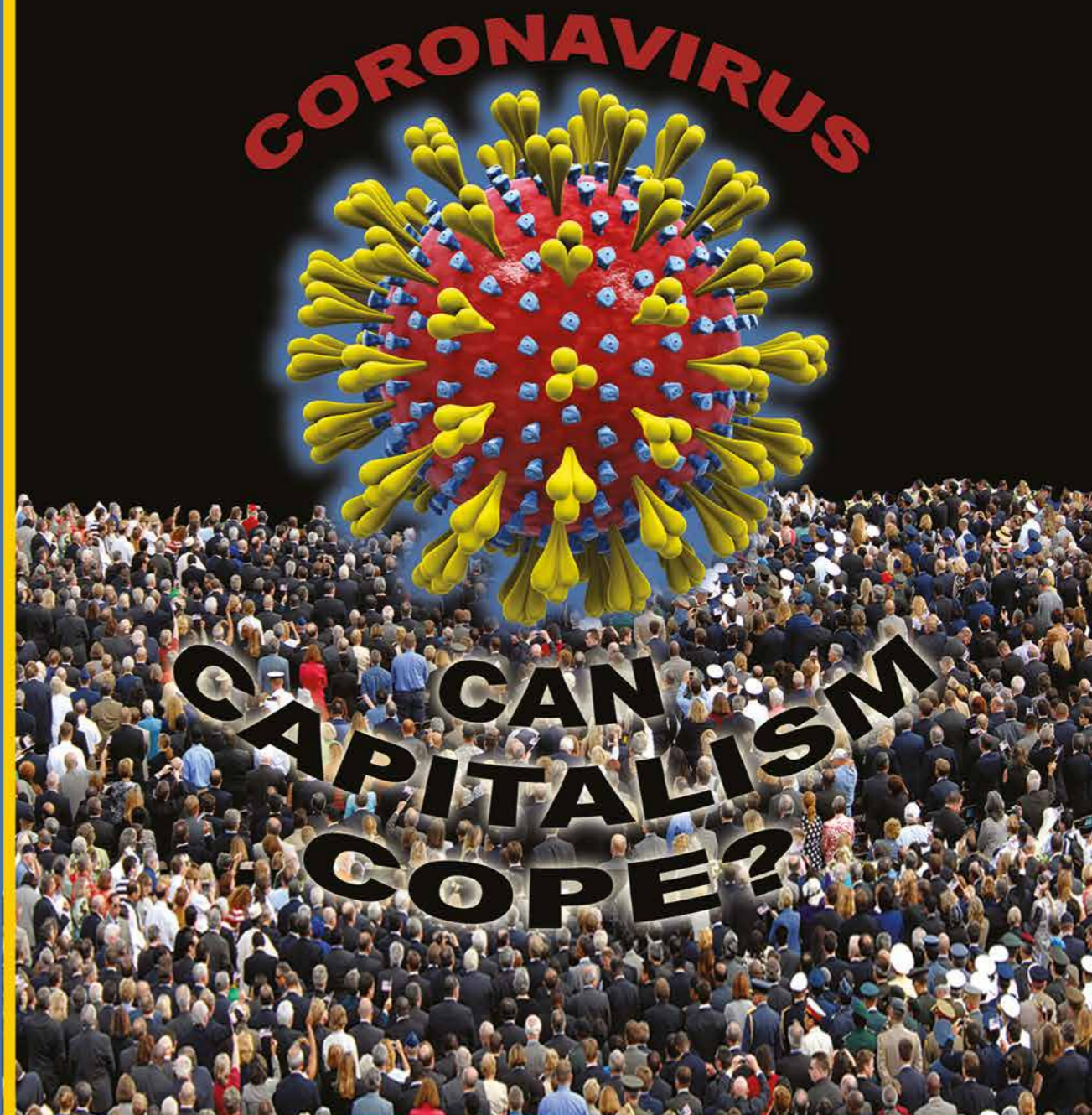
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April 2020
Vol.116 No.1388
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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



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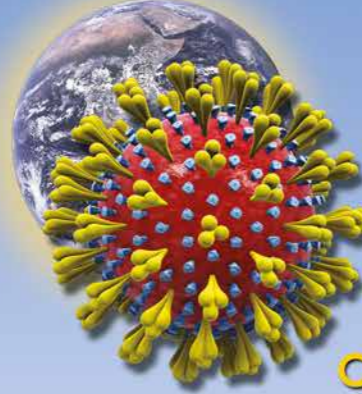


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Introducing the Socialist Party

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'

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Unfortunately there will be no public meetings for the duration of the pandemic or until the ban on them is ended. Head Office will also be closed during this time. We urge all members and supporters to take the relevant health advice.



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

LETTER

A good question

Dear Editors

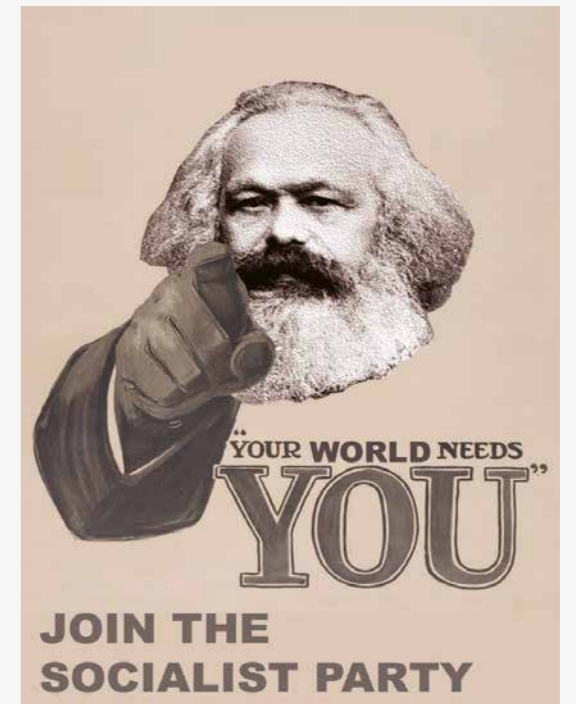
If we can have full, global, satellite, wifi coverage why can't we have full global housing for everyone, food for everyone, jobs for everyone, access to education for everyone, full coverage medical health care for everyone, etc? The reason is that it isn't profitable to house everyone, and feed everyone... etc. Industry, money, and resources chase the profits and largely neglect needs. Is the solution to make providing for human need profitable or is it to design a system of society where human need is met regardless of profits? Whichever avenue of endeavour we choose, we should remember that 'profit' is a calculation on a financial balance sheet and doesn't in itself necessarily supply any human need whereas a society based on satisfying human need should surely go some way to doing just that.

LOUIS SHAWCROSS, Northern Ireland.

instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



50 Years Ago

French "Communists" support wages system

The 37th Congress of the French trade union centre, the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), voted last November to change its statutes. It threw out the phrase "abolition of the wages system" (*disparition du salariat et du patronat*) and substituted "socialisation of the means of production and exchange" (*socialisation des moyens de production et d'échange*).

Of course the paper aims of an organisation tell us very little about what it actually does, but they can tell us how its members and leaders think. The CGT is led by members of the French Communist Party. So it is particularly revealing that they should wish to remove a phrase which Marx described as revolutionary and specifically recommended trade unionists to adopt.

It is also a measure of the French Communist Party's aim to reform rather than abolish capitalism that their trade union centre should adopt instead so meaningless a slogan as the "socialisation of the means

of production and exchange". The means of production arc already socialised in the sense that they can only be operated by social, co-operative labour. This has already been done by capitalism; what Socialism will do is to end the class monopoly of these means, to establish social or common ownership as well. The CGT's new aim cannot mean this as the social ownership of the means of exchange (banks, etc) is a contradiction in terms. When the means of production arc socially owned, wealth will be produced purely and simply to satisfy human needs. Production for the market, or exchange, will disappear and along with this banks and other commercial and financial institutions. *(Socialist Standard, April 1970)*



The Socialist Party's 2020 Summer School looks at technological progress and its application in the past, present and future. This weekend of talks and discussion is an exciting opportunity to share and explore revolutionary ideas, in the relaxing setting of Fircroft College in Birmingham.

The Socialist Party's Summer School

From the development of the first tools and the wheel through to the invention of the printing press, the steam engine, the microprocessor and beyond, technology has always shaped how we live. Scientific developments take place in the context of the social and economic conditions of the time. In capitalism, technological progress and how technology is used are driven by what is profitable and cost effective more than by what is really needed and wanted. This means that technology is often used in ways which go against our best interests, whether through environmental damage, the development of ever-more destructive weapons or the misuse of

Technology

7th - 9th August 2020

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data gathered online and through social media. In a future socialist society based on common ownership and democratic organisation of industries and services, technology could really be used to benefit us, in harmony with the environment.

Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £100, and the concessionary rate is £50. Day visitors are welcome, but please book in advance.

E-mail enquiries should be sent to spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk. To book a place online, go to spgb.net/summer-school-2020 or send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) with your contact details to Summer School, The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN.

Editorial

Capitalism struggles to cope

Capitalism survives by producing for profit, which takes precedence over human welfare. It is organised around nation states, representing the capitalist interests within their borders, competing against each other in the global market place. The new Covid-19 pandemic reveals this social system's shortcomings in how it deals with global problems.

The virus is believed to have originated in a wildlife market in Wuhan, China, where animals were traded illegally. Overcrowded conditions and poor infrastructure in the large cities allowed for the rapid infection among the population. The virus was transmitted to other countries through tourism and trade.

Faced with such a global crisis, one would think that there would be some form of international cooperation. However, this has not been the case. The initial reaction of the local Chinese officials was to suppress any information, just as state authorities had done during the 2003 SARS outbreak, in order to avoid compromising China's position in the global market place. After branding it a 'Chinese virus', Donald Trump haphazardly introduced a travel ban on European

nations without any prior consultation.

Each nation state has been pursuing its own independent policy, sometimes following conflicting medical advice.

Governments have mostly been slow to respond to this emergency, partly through uncertainty and partly through reluctance to impact on the profitability of local enterprises. This lack of global coherence, cooperation and reactivity will certainly cost lives.

Despite the great advances made in medical technology over the last century and the existence of highly trained medical staff, health services will be struggling to cope. It is predicted that the NHS could be overwhelmed. Health services like everything else in capitalism are constrained by what can be afforded. In the last ten years, health services have generally seen their funding fall as governments introduced austerity measures as part of efforts to restore the rate of profit in the aftermath of the 2008/2009 economic downturn.

The production of vaccines to combat the virus is also subject to the vagaries of the market system. The largest pharmaceutical companies have the resources to search for a vaccine but

will only do so if they can earn profits large enough to cover the development costs in the timescales required. Many of them have consolidated patents on the manufacturing processes. Even when work on a vaccine has begun, it may be shelved if the virus outbreak recedes (Stephen Buryani 'How profit makes the fight for a Coronavirus vaccine harder' *Guardian*, 4 March).

The government advises us to self-isolate if we think we have the virus, and are offering to pay 80 percent of wages to make sure workers do. But little concern has been paid to insecure workers on low wages or those who work in the gig economy, who are facing financial pressure to continue working and so risk spreading the virus.

The state has been forced to intervene in the economy and in our lives. Governments exhort us to be altruistic and to look out for others. What we need to do is develop real human solidarity. The only real way to achieve this is through developing socialist consciousness, the awareness that, as workers, we have a common interest in getting rid of capitalism and establishing a global socialist society without national frontiers.

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PATHFINDERS UNDER SIEGE

IT SEEMS hardly possible to many of us, confined indoors with no prospect of an exit strategy, that the world could have changed so much in a few short weeks. Things that seemed important a month ago are irrelevant now. Normal politics doesn't matter. Nobody could care less about Brexit. Now the only topic of conversation is the coronavirus.

Panic-buying has been fuelled by panic-reporting. Even the normally sober BBC, or at least some over-caffinated junior staff writer, temporarily succumbed to manic hyperbole by claiming that this was the greatest health threat in history (BBC Online, 20 March, since removed). Of course it wasn't, as anyone who's heard of smallpox or bubonic plague knows very well, and anyway the Beeb were misquoting the UK chief nurse, who had said it was the *health service's* biggest threat in its history.

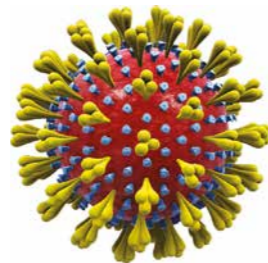
Panic has been evident among governments, who have not known how to react. Worryingly, experts have been praising totalitarian China's ability to track air and rail passengers since 2000, including where they sat and who was in the nearby seats. When asked which countries had coped best, the WHO's assistant DG included China and also Singapore, another poster boy for authoritarian uber-surveillance (*New Scientist*, 21 March).

The panic wasn't helped by inconsistency over numbers. The estimated worst-case mortality figure of 400,000 for the UK failed to take into account the average 600,000 annual deaths, mostly from age-related conditions, meaning that estimated fatalities were being reckoned twice over. This was confusing, because the annual estimate of 8,000 deaths from seasonal flu is always cited in addition to and not as part of the normal 600k death rate (bbc.co.uk/news/health-51979654). Thus it was made to seem as if virus mortality rates could be up to 50 times normal background influenza rates, which was utterly misleading.

At least it's only a coronavirus and not something worse, like bubonic plague. That's not as unlikely as it sounds. Capitalism has through largely unnecessary and stupid reasons created a global antibiotic crisis which it is doing nothing serious about, so the Black Death, or some other forgotten pathogen, may one day ride triumphantly out of the

history books to stalk the world again like the horsemen of the apocalypse in a Hammer horror movie.

The temptation for jaded socialists will be to think this is all somehow capitalism's fault, but that's hardly realistic. A new virus could surface at any time in any society. The difference may be what that society then does about it. Capitalist governments are keen to avoid getting blamed for wasting 'taxpayers' money (in reality, ruling-class money) on preparations for disasters that might not materialise, and instead tend to cross their fingers and hope that those disasters won't happen, or at least, won't happen on their watch. A socialist society wouldn't be in thrall to any ruling class holding any purse strings, and would collectively agree on the major threats and what to do about them ahead of time.



Capitalism tries to shave costs wherever and whenever it can, because costs impact on profits. So public health services tend to operate at maximum capacity, with no margin for error or emergency, on the risky assumption that nothing will go wrong. When inevitably it does go wrong, leaders distance themselves from blame by protesting that they are not fortune tellers. For socialism, a job is either worth doing properly or not at all, so it's certainly not worth doing something badly. In obviously important spheres like healthcare it would be considered pointless to reduce resources and effort to unsustainable levels.

Capitalism's 'just-in-time' distribution system saves money on storage, but collapses very quickly in the face of any large-scale social disruption. People know this, so their logical response at such times is to panic-buy, thus exacerbating the problem. Socialism, having no storage 'costs' as such, would use local storage in the same way as electrical capacitors, smoothing out peaks and troughs and making supply more robust and reliable. People would know this, and would see no need to overstock.

But what about a vaccine? This is a clever, insidious virus, with tricks that are hard to work around. The Ebola vaccine took 5 years, and that was only by breaking a lot of regulatory rules. Drug companies were urged to throw money at it, and they did, but the 2014 Ebola epidemic died out naturally before most of them could see a return on their investment. Because they lost money on Ebola, they have been very reluctant to put money into coronavirus research (bbc.co.uk/news/business-51454859). Just as with antibiotics, capitalism won't put its coin in the slot if it doesn't think there's a jackpot, even if the entire world needs that vaccine desperately. Socialism would have no such hesitation.

And yet, credit where it's due. In desperation, capitalism is suspending its own rules. Governments have put aside economic considerations in favour of something that looks almost like humane compassion. While global economies plunge into the abyss they are frantically recruiting factories to build ventilators, raiding the exchequer to ward off a social deprivation crisis, and belatedly pumping funds into vaccine research.

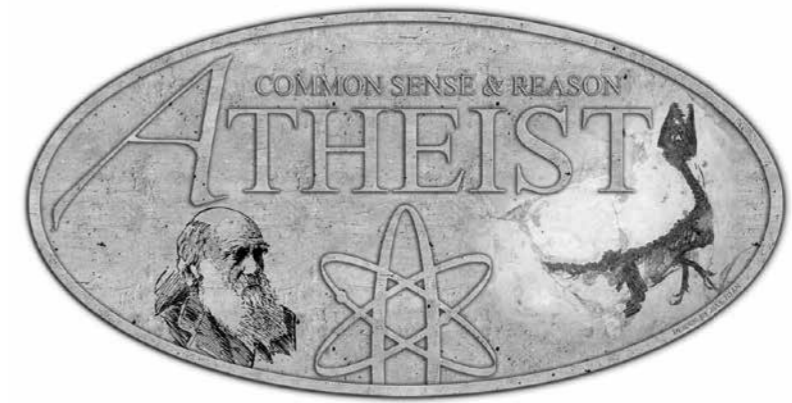
But it shouldn't take a global pandemic before capitalism is prepared to work in the interests of the people in it. In fact this is capitalism trying NOT to behave like capitalism, trying temporarily to impersonate something quite different, quite alien to itself, a cooperative system where mutual well-being is the main concern and knowledge and resources are shared for the common good.

Capitalism only resorts to this under extreme duress. It is like a coach and horses trying to walk backwards. As Dr Johnson would say, we are not surprised that it is done badly, rather that it is done at all. Yet it can't keep up the effort for long. The ruling class's sociopathic drive for profit and perpetual growth will soon reassert itself.

The world would do far better to adopt a stable social model where cooperative and sharing behaviour is built in by design, and by whose steady operations such crises may be better managed, and even less likely to emerge in the first place. People have been under siege from capitalism for too long. Now it has shown it can take a temporary holiday from itself, humanity's smartest move would be to make that holiday permanent.

PJS

RELIGION AND SOCIALISM



The question of religion is not infrequently broached with socialists. A variety of cases are made ranging from the absolutely irrefutable word of God, as recorded in the bible (or sacred scripture of choice), to attempts to reconcile religious faith with Marxism.

Liberation theology is perhaps the most systematic attempt at this latter approach on a society-wide basis. However, this turns out to be a melding of Roman Catholicism and 'Leninist socialism' of the Cuban variety in Latin America where this theology was concocted.

Sympathy with the poor rather than being the spiritual mask of the rich is laudable, but does nothing to address the fundamental cause of that poverty, the material relations of wealth production and distribution. Not only is the pursuit of profit not sinful in capitalism, it is a basic requirement any lachrymose response by the Church cannot challenge.

Socialists can respond to religious entreaties in a trenchant manner, insisting that atheism expressed as materialism is the only credible way of understanding capitalism and bringing about the conscious change required by the working class, the vast majority, to strive for and achieve socialism.

But what is meant by atheism? Rejection of an anthropomorphic God who judges every human action, rewarding the good and punishing the bad, was achieved by serious theology centuries ago. There are still the credulous who believe they can achieve great wealth by praying for it, but they usually end up considerably poorer having gifted what little money they have to the religious sect making 'divine' promises.

A more robust atheism takes issue with all forms of God promotion, anthropomorphic, theistic, deistic, pantheistic, non-interventionist uncaused cause etc. Marx, it is commonly asserted, held with this position, and yet he declined to be identified with it.

This is in no way meant to indicate that Marx held some vague quasi-religious view. Far from it. He didn't want to deny religion, but move beyond the religious question entirely. As atheism is merely the counter to theism, such a move required setting both aside. In a letter to Arnold Ruge, Marx wrote that he rejected:

'... the label atheism (which reminds one of children assuring everyone who is ready to listen to them that they are not afraid of the bogey man) ...' (Letter to Ruge, 1842).

Two years later, in the 1844 Manuscripts, Marx argued: 'Atheism, as a negation of God, has no longer any meaning, and postulates the existence of man through this negation; but socialism as socialism no longer stands in any need of such mediation.'

It is worth socialists reminding themselves what Marx

wrote in the paragraph that ends with his most quoted phrase on this subject:

'Religious suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.'

Atheism is not limited to merely attacking the symptom, religion, rather than the disease, capitalism, it also constitutes an assault on the means by which suffering may be endured.

Today it could be football or Facebook, consumerism and credit, gambling or gardening, even actual opiates or drugs of choice that have supplanted religion as the analgesic of social ills.

In Britain, people have now largely, for all intents and purposes, given up on religion. As Marx wrote in his *Theses on Feuerbach* (No. 8):

'All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.'

For all that religion has been abandoned by the majority of the working class in Britain and many other western countries, it still exerts an obviously strong influence in many parts of the world. Where that is the case religion continues to fulfil its role as a reaction to poverty, both economic and philosophic. In extremis, the opiate proves deadly, as with ISIS.

Of course, just because Marx took a view it doesn't mean it is of necessity correct: his writings are not to be quoted as pseudo-holy writ. However, on the subject of religion it would seem that the better case to be made is for socialism rather than atheism.

Religion is not to be abolished in the name of socialism. That can be left in the past with Stalin and Enver Hoxha. Better to progress the case for the working class to pursue actual socialism which requires collective conscious action by the class on its own behalf.

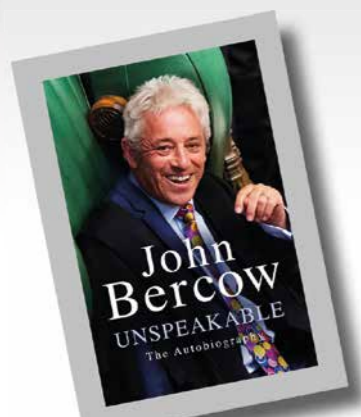
This does not entail any compromise with religion, not even if it attempts to accommodate itself to the socialist cause.

'Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat' (Communist Manifesto).

The point is not to negate religion but to transcend it through socialism harnessing the material resources available to humanity and employ them democratically for the commonweal, if not for heaven on earth, then as close as humans can get to it.

DAVE ALTON

Speaker's Corner



Unspeakable. John Bercow. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 2020. £20

It was always likely that recently retired House of Commons Speaker John Bercow would produce a memoir that settled a few scores, and he hasn't disappointed. He clearly has an issue with the British establishment and those that personify it, and 'snobbish' David Cameron comes in for particularly vitriolic treatment. To give you a flavour of Bercow's style: 'In the pantheon of great leaders, the name of David Cameron will never feature. In a list of opportunist lightweights, it will be at the top'.

Then on to Theresa May: 'Rudderless, without imagination, and with few real friends at the highest level, she stumbled on, day to day, lacking clarity, vision and the capacity to forge a better Britain. In a contest as to who has been the worst Prime Minister since 1945, it is hard to choose between Anthony Eden and Theresa May'.

And on Boris Johnson: 'As a debater he is undistinguished and, as a public speaker, though humorous, he is often downright poor – hesitant, unable to string sentences together fluently and about as likely ever to warrant the description "captivating orator" as Bertie Wooster... Apart from those notable limitations in a man who has since become Prime Minister, he is, at his occasional best, a passably adequate politician in an age not replete with them'.

Bercow's own story of course is an interesting one, the son of a Jewish cab driver who gravitated from a youthful dalliance with the right-wing, anti-immigration Monday Club to a barely disguised left-ish stance. This gained him much opprobrium during the Brexit

debates, with allegations that he was a biased 'remainer', with an influential Labour-campaigning spouse, Sally.

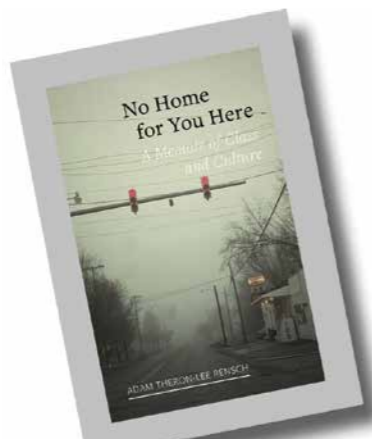
In fairness, as political autobiographies go, it is more entertaining than most, despite the criticism it has received from many reviewers. Bercow likes to see himself in the mode of a parliamentary 'reformer' and the dominant thread is about the battles he fought with traditionalists and conservatives of every stripe, including those who took an ill view of his attempts to support the rights of backbench MPs against those of the executive.

There is a surprisingly interesting (and on occasion well-argued) Epilogue where he looks at the future of parliament and of the UK as a whole over the next decade and more. He picks out the key defining features of the UK well, including the influence of its island status (with a total coastline and sea exposure greater than that of either Brazil or India), and the overwhelming dominance of London, which skews the UK population and capital distribution to something more akin to countries in the Third World.

Interestingly, whatever insight and vitriol he has to muster, little if any of it is directed at Labour's Jeremy Corbyn. Indeed, one suspects he will no doubt become Lord Bercow soon enough (even if he is not – as is usual – nominated by the Prime Minister of the day, but by the outgoing Leader of the Opposition).

DAP

Home and Away



Adam Theron-Lee Rensch: **No Home For You Here: a Memoir of Class and Culture.** Reaktion Books £14.95.

Rensch was born in rural Ohio in 1984 and spent much of his childhood in a mobile

home that had been moved from a trailer park after his family were evicted for not paying rent in protest at conditions there. He became a university student, and much of the book, which includes both personal and more general accounts, deals with the conflict between being a 'white-trash kid' and a 'liberal intellectual'. His family did not have much money but they did have fun, his mother tells him, while Rensch came to owe \$160,000 in student loans.

Rather than a characterisation in terms of physical or mental labour, he is keen to offer a material definition of class, based on ownership of resources: the capitalists control and allocate economic resources, while the working class have to sell their labour power in order to live. Even so, there are some unclear references to the middle class, which seems to consist of small-scale capitalists. Working-class life in the US has become increasingly pressurised: the minimum wage has nowhere near kept up with inflation, leading to widespread poverty. In 2016, around 30 percent of wage-earners had an annual income of less than \$15,000. Credit cards are used to fund spending, resulting in total household debt exceeding total disposable income.

Some of Rensch's friends died young, one through suicide at 33, one of a heroin overdose at 34. His father died after a fall, aged just 46: an unemployed widower with 'nothing to his name but time', who drank and gradually became less liberal in his politics ('between losing his job to the economy and his [second] wife to cancer, my father had become a reactionary'). The difference between failure and (relative) success is often just due to luck.

In rural areas, there is very little rented accommodation available, hence the need to buy a house and the extent of predatory lending to enable house purchase; hence, too, the ubiquity of subprime lending and the resulting crash of 2008. It is hard for people to leave the rural US, as doing so requires considerable time and money, including having a reliable car so you can look for a job. In small towns, churches 'provided a crucial sense of belonging'.

The book offers a well-told account of inequality and the lack of social mobility. Rensch acknowledges that he does not have an easy solution, though he does refer to ending the tyranny of wage labour. And ponder this: 'admiring the beauty of poverty and despair is easier than trying to change it'.

PB

ITALY INFECTED

COVID-19 is a new virus and is threatening to swamp regional health facilities.

There has been much confusion about whether or not to 'lock down' society or let the virus take its course. If the virus is allowed to spread uncontrolled, intensive care units will be overwhelmed, even if it is only the elderly and people with underlying health problems rather than the large majority of the younger population who require treatment. The trouble with total lockdown, however, is that the problem will present itself again once lockdown restrictions are relaxed.

Countries like China, South Korea, Italy and Spain went into total lockdown because their national governments saw no other alternative. The virus in Italy had already been present since January, probably even earlier. Once the *Italian National Institute of Health* started to register the first cases back in mid-February, it was probably too late to do anything else, because the number of cases of unknown origin was too large already. If the number of cases of known origin is low, so-called social distancing or self-isolation or quarantine can be the sensible thing to do - always providing it is clear to people what these things constitute and what their purpose is (i.e. to slow the spread

of the disease so that healthcare systems can try to cope with the peak of critical cases).

In Italy, lockdown was applied almost from the start but only to small villages in northern Italy where it was believed that the spread had started. This seemed to work in these villages, but the spread was not in fact limited to those locations. Soon the big cities of Lodi, Bergamo, Brescia, and even Milan, became heavily affected causing lockdown to be extended to the whole Lombardy region and after a week or so to the whole country.

As we go to press (late March) the peak of new cases seems to be being reached and there is hope that the virus will not affect central and southern Italy as it has the north. Aggravating factors in the north have been that many people continued their lives more or less as usual even after the restrictions came into force (even going skiing or to seaside resorts) and, especially, that many small and medium-size businesses did not close down. This meant that many workers felt forced to go to work in 'non-vital' sectors and with very few safety measures in place. On 12 March the metalworking unions (FIM, FIOM and UILM)

threatened strike action if workplaces were not made safer and some took strike action. The government encouragement of 'forced' holidays did not appeal to many workers who were effectively being asked to choose either to remain in lockdown at home and risk not being paid or to go to work in a potentially unsafe place. Not all categories of workers are effectively unionised in Italy and for the large majority of small and medium-size enterprises it was business as usual.

This can be seen as a greater risk factor than individuals going out for a walk or a run or walking their dog while keeping a distance from others. Yet subsequently these activities too have been virtually forbidden. Even the measures announced on 17 March, but which will only become law in May, do not convincingly help those workers either. According to the so-called 'Healing Italy' decree, vouchers of up to €600 will be paid by the State for

babysitters. But this involves finding a trusted person who, regardless of the lockdown, can come to babysit your children. In addition a 15-day parental leave allowance has been granted at 50 percent of full salary for the period 5 March to 3 April. And then schools remain closed, if the situation does not worsen, until 2 May. The parental leave allowance means that workers have to decide whether to take forced unpaid holidays, or

getting parental leave and losing 50 percent of their salaries (which are known to be among the lowest in Europe), or going to work and leaving their children with a babysitter (if available) or grandparents (if any). The latter has tended to be the option of choice, exposing as it does elderly people to increased danger of contracting the virus.

Italian politicians and mainstream media are talking about health coming first, but that is easy rhetoric. What this may be however is a chance for people collectively to learn to be socially united and responsible. Once again tragic events will be used to try to convince people that class differences are now irrelevant, that 'we are all in it together'. But the truth is exactly the opposite: only socialism, a society in which we truly will be 'all in it together', can properly put human health first - before profits, before the need to limit healthcare facilities, before stinting on the resources needed to fight emergencies, such as covid-19, that may arise. And only a socially conscious world majority can bring about and speed up the process of ending capitalism and bringing about socialism.

The Italian comrades



Food queue in Milan

Another Market Panic

At the time of writing, the world's stock markets have been in near free-fall with many of them entering 'bear market' territory (defined as falling 20 percent or more from their recent high). This has been in response to the concern around Covid-19 coronavirus, as human fright turns into financial panic. It is essentially because investors are fearful that 'lockdowns' in countries like Italy will negatively impact on company revenues and profits. Obvious candidates like airline companies and events management agencies have been especially hard hit, though the financial contagion has spread far and wide to nearly all sectors.

There are a number of elements to this financial panic. One is that when market sell-offs occur, the actions of dominant financial players tend to exacerbate them, as they did in the financial crisis of 2008. Many operate automatic trading systems driven by algorithms which will trigger further sales of shares when certain low prices are reached. These traders also tend to deploy 'short positions' to protect themselves from falling markets, which involves profiting from betting that certain shares will fall -- but thereby making their falls all the steeper. This has been illustrated by what US asset management firms like Fidelity have said has been happening during this panic -- that asset management firms and hedge funds have been on the sell side of most trades, while private investors have disproportionately been on the other side of the trade, buying for the longer-term (in the view that there's a sale on). The *Financial Times* (7 March) reported that since 1960, of the 13 most volatile stock market periods, seven of them have happened since 2007.

Investors have been especially concerned that the coronavirus scare will lead to recessions in the countries affected (and even others too). This is on the back of investor suspicion that some of the world's major economies have most likely been on the brink of a recession anyway. A good indicator of this has been the recent inversion of the yield curve in the world's largest economy,

the US. This happens when interest rates for tying up your money for longer (e.g ten years) are lower than for short periods (e.g two years). It is the opposite to the usual situation, and indicates fear in the government bond markets as investors move from investing in riskier assets to the safe haven of long-term government bonds, pushing their prices up and their yields down. This happened in the US late last year and is usually one of the best lead indicators of a coming recession there is, also reflecting the fact investors believe future interest rates will fall (as they do during recessions). During the current panic, the yield on 10 year US Treasuries has reached the lowest it has been in history, at the time of writing 0.7 percent, i.e less than inflation and therefore effectively paying the US government for the privilege of taking your money.

Another factor in the market panic has been the oil price. Some of those hardest hit on the stock markets have been oil majors like BP and Royal Dutch Shell as the oil price collapses, falling at one stage by a third in a single day (to around \$30 a barrel for Brent crude). This has been because the major oil producer states, dominated by OPEC, have failed to agree with another major oil producer, Russia, to limit production and therefore push up prices. There is a suspicion that Russia won't play ball as it hopes a falling oil price will drive a lot of newer US companies producing oil and gas from shale deposits out of business altogether -- a tactical ploy that is exacerbating the panic.

Despite this current chaos, the crisis will of course pass and lower interest rates and lower commodity prices like oil will be among the motor forces for this. In the meantime the traders will scream and shout as they try to assess the real extent of the underlying economic crisis - seemingly unable to leap out of a rollercoaster ride that's been scarier than usual for them, and for some good reasons.

DAP

COOKING THE BOOKS

Capitalism catches a cold

The pandemic, or global epidemic, of the new coronavirus strain could not have come at a worse time for the world capitalist economy which has only been growing weakly, with some predicting another downturn. It might well precipitate this through the effect on production of workers being told or compelled to stay at home as well as of those too sick to work.

Production fell considerably in China where the outbreak started:

'Factory activity in China fell at a record rate in February as manufacturers closed their operations to contain the spread of coronavirus. The country's official measure of manufacturing activity -- the Purchasing Manufacturer's Index (PMI) -- dropped to 35.7 from 50 in January' (www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-51689178).

Output has also fallen, or will, in other countries though less in countries like Britain with a larger service sector, some of whose workers can work from home. The pandemic won't last for ever and will eventually die down but, before it does, most capitalist enterprises will see their profits reduced.

Less production usually means less profit. This has spooked the stock market where past profits are redistributed and

future profits gambled on. It also brings out that it is not entrepreneurs and their money-making schemes who are the 'wealth producers', but those workers who actually play some part in changing the form of materials that originally came from nature.

In his budget speech on 11 March, the new Chancellor Rishi Sunak said, when announcing measures to help small businesses pay sick pay, 'if we expect 20 per cent of the workforce to be unable to work at any one time ...' As the UK workforce amounts to 34.5 million, that's some 6.5 million the government is apparently anticipating might be off work during the peak of the epidemic. This would only be temporary but would still translate into a significant drop in production and so in the flow of profits.

Capitalist businesses (except for those employing fewer than 250 workers) will also suffer a hit to their profits in that they will have to pay sick pay from day one rather than day three to those off with the virus or who have been advised to self-isolate. In view of the restrictions on large gatherings and travel, businesses with capital invested in these activities will be hit particularly hard. The headline in the *Times* Business section on 13 March read 'Pandemic threatens to push UK-listed companies over the edge.' Only two, one

of which was Cineworld, were listed as at risk of not being able to continue as a going concern. Others weren't in danger of going under, only of not making so much profit:

'A string of other UK-listed companies yesterday warned about the financial hit they were facing from the virus. Go-Ahead, the train and bus operator, Traveline, the one ticket seller, and WH Smith, the retailer, all said their businesses were being hurt by a slowdown in travel.'

What about the workers? They, too, will see their income reduced, though the government's announcement that sick pay would be payable from day one for those affected will mitigate this. Not that this is being done out of concern for the workers; they will in effect be being paid to stay off work so as to avoid the virus spreading further and causing further damage to profits and the capitalist economy. Those in the gig economy, some 4.7 million, mostly the lowest paid, will suffer the most.

The whole episode is a reminder that downturns can be caused by outside factors as well as by the internal workings of the capitalist economy.

PROPER GANDER

'The Detail Which Moves You Is The Same Detail That Lets You Know It's True'

AS DAVID Baddiel says in his recent documentary, what happened to the Jews under the Nazis is unbelievable in the sense that it's difficult to grasp that people actually carried it out. Millions of Jews, along with Slavs, Roma, disabled people and gay men, were murdered by the Nazi regime during the Second World War. Despite the overwhelming evidence, some people think that this is literally unbelievable, a mindset which *Confronting Holocaust Denial With David Baddiel* (BBC2) explores.

Baddiel's Jewish mother and grandparents escaped Germany in 1939, but his extended family who couldn't get away were killed. He says that through them, he feels the history of the what happened deeply and personally. His documentary starts by looking at the origins of Holocaust denial in actions taken during the war. The Nazis destroyed some evidence of the death camps, not just documents but also victims' bodies, which were callously broken down with acids before the bones were ground up for fertiliser. Baddiel is understandably shocked to hear this, and also unsure why the Nazis tried to cover up something they thought was 'glorious'. Some idiots have latched onto gaps in evidence as 'proof' that the atrocities didn't take place. The British state's actions also helped subsequent deniers. The Ministry of Information withheld details about the what was happening, as shown in a 1941 memo to propagandists which claimed that people would be more likely to support the war if the Nazis were known to be targeting 'indisputably innocent victims'. Jewish people weren't seen as innocent enough by the state, and so their deaths were downplayed. This shows a deep-rooted anti-Semitism, as it implies Jews aren't worth as much as other people and that they brought it on themselves. Ignoring that Jews were the main targets continued to the end of the war. When the camps were liberated in 1945, many British newsreels didn't mention that most of the victims were Jewish. Later, when West Germany became an ally against the USSR during the Cold War, what had happened became an embarrassment. Baddiel says 'an eerie silence fell over the memory of the Holocaust'.

It wasn't until the 1960s when awareness of the slaughter spread wider,

with news reports of Nazis on trial and published accounts from survivors. Baddiel visits Rachel Levy, now aged 89, and who was a teenager living in Czechoslovakia when she and her family were taken to Auschwitz. She was separated from her mother and siblings, who she never saw again, and was later marched to Belsen, where she found her aunt dying. It's hard to comprehend something so appalling as what Rachel Levy lived through. But, as Baddiel tells us, 'the detail which moves you is the same detail that lets you know it's true. And therefore to say that it's not true is obscene'.



David Baddiel

Paradoxically, as awareness of what happened grew, so did its denial. This came through twisted pamphlets and books produced by 'revisionist historians' like Ernst Zündel and David Irving, both of whom ended up in court. Zündel was jailed several times in Canada for publishing literature likely to incite hatred, while Irving filed a libel suit against historian Deborah Lipstadt, who refuted his views in her 1993 book *Denying The Holocaust: The Growing Assault On Truth And Memory*. As the case was filed in Britain, where the law places the burden of proof on the defendant, Lipstadt was in the odd position of having to prove it happened in order to counter Irving's warped argument that he can't be a Holocaust-denier if it didn't take place. He was defeated and landed with a £2million bill. When deniers' views aren't resting on fake history they use 'nerdy, geeky science' to focus on specifics such as the ventilation of gas chambers to claim that they couldn't have worked. These days, pamphlets and books have largely been replaced by websites and social media as the deniers' main outlets.

Baddiel accepts that to understand Holocaust-denial he should meet a denier, so he travels to Ireland to visit Dermot Mulqueen. His pathetic reasons

for rejecting that the mass murders took place include saying that nothing sinister could have happened in Auschwitz because it had a swimming pool and that there couldn't have been enough ovens to burn everyone as an oven can only fit one person. He even comes out with a song, out of tune and out of tune with reality. Misfits like Mulqueen shouldn't be dismissed as irrelevant, though, as Holocaust denial is on a trajectory which led to the killings in America at Charlottesville in Virginia, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C and the Pittsburgh synagogue, among others.

Worryingly, as many as one in six people worldwide believe that what happened has been exaggerated or never happened. In the UK, six per cent of people have these views, while the proportion is as high as 82 per cent in the West Bank and Gaza. There, this is largely because of beliefs that Jews have overstated what happened in order to win Israel and reparations. Elsewhere, Holocaust-denial comes about for different reasons. In Eastern Europe, anti-Semitism and far-right views in general are part of nationalists' attempts to distance themselves from previous Soviet influence. In Western Europe and America, anti-Semitism is often linked with conspiracy theories that Jews secretly run the world, although how they have managed this if they're 'subhuman' is another of those logic-defying examples of doublethink which anti-Semites manage.

Basic rational arguments, along with photographs, film footage or interviews with survivors should be enough to silence Holocaust deniers, but this doesn't seem to work. Their minds can somehow shut out evidence and accommodate what to anyone else are obvious contradictions. Deniers can't think clearly because they have been stunted by a narrow, exclusionary view of identity. Anti-Semitism, nationalism, racism, homophobia and any other kind of prejudice comes from creating and emphasising differences between people which ignore our common humanity. It's not easy, though, to extend common humanity to include Nazis or Holocaust deniers...

MIKE FOSTER

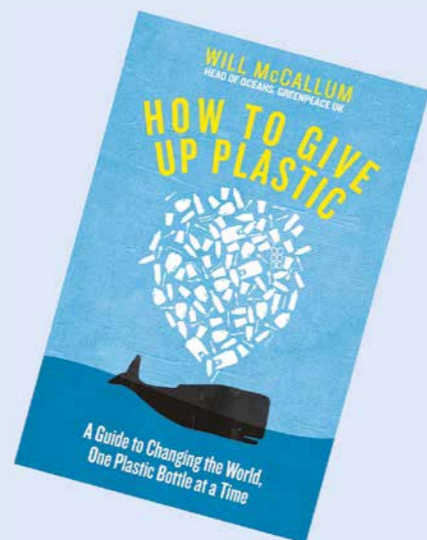
THE REAL WASTE

Many people who sympathise with the socialist case do not join us because they feel that working for socialism requires a lot of time and effort, with no guarantee of success. Much better, they may say, to work for short-term gains that need less commitment and are more likely to be achieved.

I was recently reading Will McCallum's book *How to Give Up Plastic*. This gives a detailed account of the problems caused by various forms of plastic, from bags and bottles to straws, nappies and takeaway coffee cups. Many of these are used just the once and then disposed of, eventually leading to the clogging up of rivers, beaches and oceans. Samples taken from the deepest place on earth, the Mariana Trench in the western Pacific, contain microplastics.

McCallum makes many recommendations for how people can massively reduce their use of plastics, such as having reusable water bottles and coffee cups. But aside from what people can do at an individual level, often without too much trouble, he gives examples of larger campaigns. Clearing litter from a park or beach requires a lot of work and preparation, from publicising the event to bringing bin bags and weighing what has been collected. He also posits a ladder of escalating approaches: writing letters, holding a meeting, writing an article for the media, organising a petition, and finally having a protest (which may just mean leaving unnecessary packaging at the till in a supermarket, rather than staging a demo).

What a lot of effort! And campaigns like this will always come up against the simple fact that capitalism is basically about profit, not about reducing pollution and conserving the oceans. Consumer pressure can bring about changes in



the ways in which companies source, produce and package commodities, and there is nothing wrong with having a reusable coffee cup, but when seen against the background of all the ecological damage done by capitalism, this really is, well, a drop in the ocean. All the time and ingenuity that is spent on such campaigning would be far better put to the task of making socialists and bringing about a society based on meeting human need, which would include environmental considerations being made a priority.

PB

COOKING THE BOOKS

Iron asteroids and golden meteorites

'Iron asteroid that can make us billionaires', read the headline in the *Times* (6 March), explaining:

'Somewhere far away hurtling through space is a giant ball thought to be made from enough metal to make everyone on Earth a billionaire. (...) American scientists have said that the body, probably once the core of a planet, contains iron worth £8,000 quadrillion. A quadrillion is one followed by 15 zeros. Shared among the world's nearly eight billion people, this would amount to about £1 billion each.'

Actually, the asteroid is currently worth nothing as its iron is not available for human use, but even if it were to be brought to Earth it would be worth nothing like that amount.

This is because the value of items of wealth produced as commodities, i.e., for sale, is determined by the average amount of labour that has to be expended under average conditions to produce it from start to finish; or, more accurately, to reproduce it, as, if this average falls for newly produced items, then it falls too for all previously produced ones.

In his pamphlet *Producers and Parasites* John Keracher pointed out:

'Gold as dug out of the mine has a value the same as other metals have a value and for the same reason. They are all repositories of human labor. More labor is required to get an ounce of gold than an ounce of iron. If gold were as plentiful as iron or coal, requiring the same amount of labour to produce as these two commoner minerals, gold would be just as cheap.'

Eugen von Boehm-Bawerk, a nineteenth-century Austrian economist, tried to refute the Marxian labour theory of value by invoking the example of a 'gold lump which falls down on the parcel of a landed proprietor as meteor'. This lump of gold, he claimed, would have value, the same as that of other lumps of gold of the same weight, without having been the product of any human labour.

Louis Boudin replied in his *The Theoretical System of Karl Marx*:

'Its value, like that of all commodities, is the socially necessary labor that must be spent on its reproduction. The clouds not being in the habit of showering gold on us, and the necessarily prevailing method of obtaining gold being by spending labor on its production (...), this

gold, if wasted as suggested by Boehm-Bawerk, could not be obtained again from the clouds, but would have to be produced by labor' (p. 110).

On the other hand, if golden meteorites should become a regular occurrence, the value of gold would fall, from the cost of mining it to the cost of collecting the meteorites. This is what would happen to the value of iron if the asteroid could somehow be brought to Earth. The cost of producing iron would fall to the cost of chipping it off the grounded asteroid. This would be considerably less than the value of iron today and so considerably reduce the worth of the asteroid.

So, everyone on Earth would not become a billionaire. That assumes that the value of the asteroid would be shared evenly amongst the world's population, which of course it wouldn't be under capitalism as the asteroid would be the private property of some rich individual, corporation or state. But it would also be impossible because capitalism is based on there being a propertyless class obliged to work for wages and, if we were all billionaires, who would do the work of keeping society going?

WOOD FOR THE TREES

A Man of his Time

ONE OF the many fascinations of history is trying to work out what was the motivation of those who made it. The possibilities can be many and various but historians all warn us not to project our own values and perceptions onto those who lived in the past. Quite often the observation that 'he was a man of his time' is used to explain and sometimes justify actions that most feel to be abhorrent in a contemporary context. There seems to be some kind of limit placed on the applicability of this observation since it is never used to justify or explain, for instance, the activities of Hitler or Stalin. We are given the impression that the further back in time we go the more alien the dominant ideologies of morality and politics become. Certainly any attempt to 'judge' the actions of historical characters by anachronistically using our own values is problematic but we do see evidence of universal ethical sensibilities throughout history. What are we to make of this paradox?

To examine this question we'll use The Crusades of the Middle Ages as it remains a prime example of a raging debate about the motivations of the participants that shows no sign of a resolution. Some historians insist on Christian piety as being the prime motivating force whilst others point to the Pope's desire to unite Christendom under his hegemony or yet others highlight the need of minor sons of the nobility to create their own fiefdoms. Some consider the Crusades as an early precursor of imperialism motivated purely by plunder and power. Not that all or some of these are necessarily incompatible with each other but we do know that they often came into conflict, a factor that would ultimately be one of the reasons leading to the downfall of the Crusader States. It would be naïve to deny that the ideologies and values of the historians concerned play a role in the conclusions they reach despite the manifest importance of guarding against this. It would be equally naïve to believe the motivation of a Crusader to be that which he declared it to be - hypocrisy seems to have thrived within every historical period. Psychologically we also



An-Nasir Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub

all have a tendency to rationalise our actions, if we feel uneasy about them, in an effort to avoid guilt. In other words our motivation may be unclear to ourselves. We may be able to agree on what was done historically but given the above complexities can we ever be sure why those involved acted as they did?

Many of us enjoy historical biographies which ultimately focus on the question of motivation. No one biography will ever completely coincide with another - if they did the whole exercise would be rendered meaningless. Different crusaders had different motivations which were expressed within a context created by their superiors who in turn reacted to circumstances which led to an inevitable clash of warrior cultures and their imperial ambitions. Two of the most famous of these warriors were Richard I of the Angevin Empire and Saladin of the Ayyubid Empire. Their reputations have fluctuated down the centuries and many biographers have seen both similarities and profound differences in their character and motivation. They were obviously both 'men of their time' but one became notorious for brutality (Richard) and the other is often seen as

one of the originators of 'the chivalric code'. We might ascribe this to their divergent cultural backgrounds but it does weaken the stereotype of what it means to be 'a man of your time'. Any acknowledgement of acts of compassion, righteousness, mutual respect or regret also weakens the concept of historical figures merely being the conditioned products of their time.

It may be that only a few have ever stepped back from the values of their culture to acquire a more objective perspective (as, of course, socialists claim to be able to do) but in terms of our evolution as a species the historical record is very recent. Our communal and social predilections and the feelings of compassion and empathy that this engenders have often come into conflict with the cultural values of authoritarianism, exploitation and hierarchy. In an attempt to excuse or explain the actions of those in history it is never enough to point to perceived historical/cultural limitations. This can so often lead to unfounded conclusions concerning 'human nature' and give

those who seek to excuse the excesses of capitalism a readymade formula of despair. We so often hear phrases like: 'there's always been warfare' or there'll always be hierarchies of wealth and power' which are clearly projections of contemporary prejudice and historical ignorance onto the motivations of those in the past and this in turn masquerades as an example of not doing so by invoking the importance of not making moral judgements; in other words the formulation of 'a man of his time' is itself a projection of contemporary values. It implies that these values are somehow superior to those of the past. It might be that the moral and political aspirations of mankind have remained much the same but have been viciously suppressed by the emergence of private property and its power elites. Will we ever be able to explain or excuse the actions of Tony Blair, George Bush Jnr. or Osama Bin Ladin by saying that they were merely 'men of their time'?

WEZ

UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

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 Sun. 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 2nd Sun (Jan 3rd Sun), 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.ksrb@worldsocialism.org
South West regional branch. Meets 3rd Sat. 2pm at the Railway Tavern, 131 South Western Road, Salisbury SP2 7RR. Contact: Ray Carr, Flat 1, 99 Princess Rd, Poole, BH12 1BQ. 01202 257556 or 07929627689.
Brighton. Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me
Canterbury. Contact: Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB.
Luton. Contact: Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP.
Redruth. Contact: Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence

Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. 01209 219293.
East Anglia. Contact: David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccleson-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. 01692 582533. Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hetherset, NR9 3JD. 01603 814343.
Essex. Contact: Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billericay, CM12 0EX. patdeutz@gmail.com.
Cambridge. Contact: Andrew Westley, wezelecta007@gmail.com. 07890343044.

IRELAND
Cork. Contact: Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. 021 4896427. mariekev@eircom.net
NORTHERN IRELAND
Belfast. Contact: Nigel McCullough. 02890 930002

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 3rd Weds. 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@btpenworld.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.
 Contact: Richard Botterill, 21 Pen-Y-Bryn Rd, Gabalfa, Cardiff, CF14 3LG. 02920-615826. botterillr@gmail.com

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

LATIN AMERICA
 Contact: J.M. Morel, Calle 7 edif 45 apto 102, Multis nuevo La loteria, La Vega, Rep. Dominicana.

AFRICA
Kenya. Contact: Patrick Ndege, PO Box 13627-00100, GPO, Nairobi
Zambia. Contact: Kephass Mulenga, PO Box 280168, Kitwe.

ASIA
Japan. Contact: Michael. japan.wsm@gmail.com

AUSTRALIA
 Contact: Trevor Clarke, wspa.info@yahoo.com.au

EUROPE
Denmark. Contact: Graham Taylor, Kjaerslund 9, Floor 2 (middle), DK-8260 Viby J.
Germany. Contact: Norbert. weltsozialismus@gmx.net
Norway. Contact: Robert Stafford. hallblithe@yahoo.com
Italy. Contact: Gian Maria Freddi, Via Poiano n. 137, 37142 Verona.
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COMPANION PARTIES OVERSEAS
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THE TRADE IN FOOTBALLERS



English Premier League (EPL) football clubs will be returning to the former transfer window closing date of 13 August. This decision was made at a three-hour-long shareholders meeting that took place in London on 6 February.

For the last two years the windows closure date has taken place on the eve of the new Premier League season. This arrangement caused frustration for English clubs as their football counterparts in Europe continue to buy and sell players because their transfer windows allow them to continue trading in the market and thereby giving them an 'unfair advantage'. A leading critic amongst others of the European advantage in the transfer market this season has been Maurice Pochettino, the ex-Tottenham Hotspur manager, who has made no bones about the restless effect it has had on some of his players, citing Christian Eriksson in particular.

During the English closure period, foreign clubs consider strengthening their squad by making discreet and indiscreet enquiries as to whether a particular club would consider selling one or more of their top players for the forthcoming season. Individual players, upon learning from their agent or possibly from a newspaper article that the enquiring football club would be prepared to pay a large sum of money to procure their services (and increase their wages), may be sorely tempted to leave their parent club, especially if they are feeling unsettled.

So despite the large sum of money that premier footballers earn from their skills, they are in fact traded on the 'market' in much the same way as commodities in 'futures markets' are sold on financial exchanges. Each year the January Sales remind us that people will queue for hours in the cold to buy a fur coat or a desired consumer durable on sale at a reduced price.

In a socialist society where money no longer exists, people wishing to play football will be free to discuss their playing options, while goods and services created by the people will no longer be subject to the whims and caprices of a capitalist market system.

KEVIN

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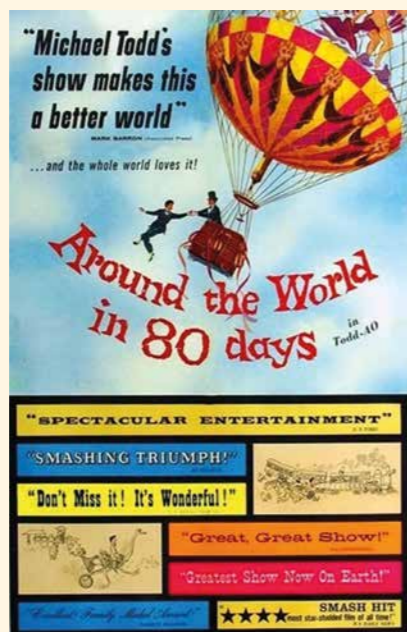
TRAVELLING HOPEFULLY

It now sounds massively out of date, but Jules Verne's 1872 novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* pointed to the increased speed of travel, as the result of the expansion of railways and the opening of the Suez Canal. For transport is not just a way of travelling from one place to another, and technological developments in means of transport have both reflected and contributed to the rise of global capitalism. For centuries relatively few people travelled far outside their local areas, though there were exceptions (soldiers, sailors, explorers, merchants, slaves). But travel is now a part of people's lives, from the daily commute into work to the annual holiday, and also an essential part of how capitalism operates, including travel for business meetings, movement of raw materials and finished goods and also of armed forces to protect the interests of rulers. At the same time, transport raises various issues, the efficiency, reliability and safety of travel, and its environmental impact all being crucial.

State-owned British railway services were sold off from 1995 onwards, though in many cases the new 'private' franchises are part-owned by other governments, such as the French and German. These companies receive massive subsidies, and sometimes have to walk away from contracts that are still not profitable enough. Even the Conservative government has had to take back two failing rail franchises, Northern and East Coast. There is a plethora of companies and tickets, and woe betide you if by mistake you get on a service run by the 'wrong' company so that your ticket is not valid for it. Delays and cancellations have become so commonplace that they are no longer a surprise. TransPennine Express had to cancel some services as they had apparently not realised that drivers would have to be trained to run their new trains. At least things are not as bad as South Africa, where passengers travelling from Johannesburg to Cape Town were recently left stranded for over a day. Of course, neither state- nor privately-owned rail systems, or some mix of the two, are really run in the interests of passengers, because transport is run to make a profit rather than to meet people's needs.

Bus services, especially in rural areas, have also suffered from cut-backs and the concerns of profit. Though half of low-income households have no car and so are reliant on public transport, it is difficult to run buses at a profit in many areas. While some routes have been subsidised, austerity has led to reductions in subsidies, resulting, for instance, in plenty of places – especially outside big cities – having unaffordable fares and effectively no bus services of an evening. So many people are isolated, and, while it is all very well for pensioners who have free bus travel, it is no use if there are no buses to catch.

Earlier this year the Centre for Cities think-tank issued a report *Cities Outlook 2020*, which included a chapter on poor air quality in cities. Transport is not the only cause of air pollution, and some pollution is blown in from outside cities (including across the English Channel). Nevertheless, transport, especially road transport, is the main source of nitrogen dioxide pollution, though it has a less central role in pollution from fine particulate matter. The Daily Air Quality



Index (DAQI) prepared by the Met Office is based on five pollutants; it varies greatly from one area to another. In 2018, DAQI was at a level likely to affect those with pre-existing health issues on 62 days in Bournemouth, but only seven days in Belfast and Edinburgh. In London nearly 40 per cent of monitored roads were on average above the legal limit for nitrogen dioxide. And poor air quality is a killer: fine particulate matter is estimated to have caused 14,400 deaths of those aged 25 or older in UK cities in 2017. Living near a busy road can increase the chance of a hospital admission for a stroke, and stunt lung growth in children.

And it is not just air pollution, but also the impact that transport can have on carbon dioxide emissions and hence climate change. Air travel is responsible for just 2.5 percent of global CO₂ emissions, but is expected to increase massively by

mid-century, and there are other damaging emissions as well, such as particulates and water vapour. Ryanair were recently refused permission to advertise themselves as a 'low CO₂ emissions airline', on the grounds that no airline could be. Flying is energy-intensive, and a very small number of people who fly a lot produce very high levels of CO₂. Even a return flight from London to Edinburgh will produce more CO₂ than the carbon footprint for a whole year of the average person in Uganda. Just two or three return flights can more than offset a person's attempt to minimise their carbon footprint (such as being a vegan and having a reusable coffee cup). Sustainable fuels, such as biofuels, remain very much in development. A frequent flyer levy is sometimes proposed, but may have little overall effect as air travel increases.

Road transport can produce carbon emissions too. The government has announced a plan to ban the sale of new petrol, diesel or hybrid cars by 2032, but it is not clear that they have any concrete ideas on how to ensure there is enough electric or hydrogen charging infrastructure available by that date.

Let's look at some realistic ways in which a socialist world could address these problems, without in any way predicting how things will be. We might suggest that in socialism there will be far less long-distance travel for work purposes. After all, most 'business trips' nowadays are for purposes of marketing and profit-making, and there are plenty of journeys for governmental or diplomatic reasons. Already video conferencing is beginning to take the place of some face-to-face meetings. We cannot say anything definite about commuting to work: maybe there will be fewer big cities, or people will live closer to where they work and so need less commuting. Nor can we comment on the transport of raw materials. There might certainly be less air travel, as people elect to travel by more leisurely means in order to enjoy the journey. New car-sharing trends are starting to emerge even today, and it is likely that there will be far fewer private cars in socialism, with the emphasis on public transport instead. But whatever happens, transport policies will address issues of safety, the environment and meeting people's needs, not of profit-making.

PAUL BENNETT

MATERIAL WORLD

Proxy warring in Syria

Last month's *Socialist Standard* focused upon Turkey's policy to grab a share of the Eastern Mediterranean gas fields. Turkey, once called the 'sick man of Europe', is endeavouring to confirm its role as a regional power. In the chaos of Syria, Turkey has been an active participant.

Recently there have been incidents where Turkish troops suffered numerous casualties caused by the Syrian government, which led to Turkey retaliating.

It was clear that working people in Syria started the uprising against the Assad regime because of the lack of freedom and social justice, the prevailing corruption and discrimination. Life for the majority was dismal with low incomes, a rising cost of living, homelessness, and unemployment, which all served to spark Syria's 'Arab Spring'. However, foreign powers and various Islamic jihadists became involved and changed the direction of the people's uprising. The popular protests were diverted by neighbouring rulers into a proxy war between Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Turkey with the support of the US and Western nations on one side with Assad's government, Iran and Russia on the other. The Syrian civil war proceeded to develop into a series of sieges.

Way back at the beginning of Syria's civil war, Turkish authorities facilitated the involvement of the Islamists by permitting the infiltration of jihadists into Syria via its borders. It also allowed commandeered oil that financed ISIS/ISIL operations to be transported through Turkey to be sold on the world market.

As the Syrian situation escalated it resulted in the mass movement of refugees, with Turkey hosting millions of displaced Syrians fleeing for safety. Turkey is also the route for refugees to reach



Europe and it entered into an agreement with the EU to stem the flow of refugees. These desperate and vulnerable people have now become political pawns used by Turkey with Greece now ignoring international law and slamming the doors shut in the faces of refugees.

At first the Kurdish independence movement tried a third way in that it would side neither with the regime nor with the opposition. It would defend itself, but it would not wage war. Starting in mid-2012, various places in the Kurdish areas were one by one freed from Assad control. When Kurdish separatists created an autonomous region, Rojava, this was seen as a direct threat to the rule of Turkey and it led to a direct invasion of Syria to neutralise the PYG/PKK (Kurdish People's Protection Units/Kurdistan Workers' Party). It meant a military stand-off with the US who inserted its forces within the Kurds' defences to assist the Kurds

in combating the Islamist terrorists. This ended when Trump re-deployed US forces to secure Syria's oil fields and it left Turkey along with Syrian mercenaries with a free rein to launch an assault against the Kurds who quickly then looked to the Syrian government and its Russian mercenaries for protection.

Added to this complex situation is the current Syrian regime's advance to retake the last rebel-held territory in the country, the province of Idlib which is under the control of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a former al-Qaeda affiliate. Turkey is backing these anti-Assad rebels. This has brought Syria and Turkey into direct conflict and created a possible confrontation with Russia. If the Syrian government is victorious, there will be a new flight of refugees fleeing towards the safety of Turkey increasing the refugee burden Turkey already carries.

But Turkish military expansionism has not stopped the UK from selling Turkey weaponry. The UK has licensed sales of military equipment to Turkey worth more than £1bn since 2013, according to the Campaign Against the Arms Trade, principally aircraft, helicopters, drones, grenades, small arms and ammunition. Leading armament manufacturers BAE Systems and TAI were awarded with an Open General Export Licence that makes the flow of weapons to Turkey easier. It wasn't until October 2019 that the UK government halted new sales of weapons to Turkey while still honouring existing arms contracts.

In fact the world's arms traders – the 'merchants of death' – are literally making a killing out of this war, with those in Turkey and Russia being able to test their weapons under battlefield conditions.

ALJO

1320
1820
2020



Tens of thousands of Scottish nationalists would have been parading through the streets of Arbroath this month in their kilts and tartan regalia, flourishing their Saltires and Lion Rampants flags, celebrating a 700-year old document. Far fewer will be commemorating another event which took place 500 years later, this April's bicentennial of the Weavers Uprising (also known as the Radical War.)

One is a story of a letter to the Pope requesting his papal blessing for the privileges of Scottish nobles and their birthright to the subjugation of their tenants and peasants (the correct title of the Arbroath Declaration is 'Letter of Barons of Scotland to Pope John XXII'.)

The other story is one of the common-folk's resistance to exploitation and a struggle against oppression.

Scottish barons

For historians, the 1820 rising of the weavers was a minor insignificant event in the annals of Scottish history but then, of course, the Declaration of Arbroath was swiftly forgotten too, and only resurrected for a propaganda purpose very different from the mistaken belief held by today's nationalists that it was declaring the independence of the Scottish people. In 1680 Sir George Mackenzie publicised it, not as an expression of nationalism but as support for those who wished to curtail royal power.

Historian Neil Davidson takes the key passage to be: 'Yet if he [Robert the Bruce] shall give up what he has begun, seeking to make us or our kingdom subject to the king of England or to the English, we would strive at once to drive him out as our enemy and a subverter of his own rights and ours, and we would make some other man who was able to defend us our king; for, as long as a hundred of us remain alive,

we will never on any conditions be subjected to the lordship of the English. For we fight not [for] glory, nor riches, nor honours, but for freedom alone, which no good man gives up without his life.'

Its message is first directed at the English king, Edward II, informing him that it was pointless for him to attempt to depose Robert the Bruce with a more subservient king, since the remainder of the Scottish aristocracy would not cease its resistance. Secondly, it is also aimed at Robert the Bruce's dubious past record; they would not accept his jeopardising their interests

The idea that the Arbroath Declaration challenged the Divine Right of Kings with the notion that the nation itself was foremost and the monarch merely its steward, is presented solely to justify Bruce usurping the rightful king John Balliol. The section of the Declaration reading:

'If this prince [Bruce] shall leave these principles he hath so nobly pursued, and consent that we or our kingdom be subjected to the king or people of England, we will immediately endeavour to expel him, as our enemy and as the subverter both of his own and our rights, and we will make another king, who will defend our

liberties'

It should be read as a cautionary warning and a clear threat to Robert the Bruce himself.

Those medieval signatories to the 1320 Declaration were not leading any 'liberation struggle'. In fact, John de Menteith, who turned William Wallace over to the English king, placed his seal upon the Declaration of Arbroath.

What did the the document actually mean? It was the 'freedom' of the Scottish barons that it was concerned with. The 'people' of Scotland were the nobles, the majority of whom at that time were still culturally Anglo-Norman, despite inter-marriage. None of the signatories held the view that the actual people of Scotland should have any say in any issue and they had no concept of popular sovereignty whatsoever

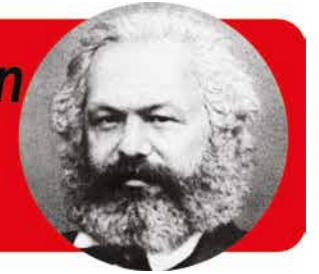
Weavers' Revolt

If true 'freedom-fighters' are required then Scottish workers should look not to the winners and losers of aristocratic medieval family feuds over the throne of Scotland, but to those brave if foolhardy weavers who rose up five hundred years later in April 1820.

The 'Battle' of Bonnymuir took place on the 5 April, 1820. Thirty-two cavalymen routed twenty-five, poorly armed, striking weavers. John Baird and Andrew Hardie, who came to be known as the 'Radical Martyrs', were sentenced to be hanged and beheaded (along with James Wilson who was later part of a riot that broke prisoners free at Greenock.)

Glasgow was at this time just a collection of small village communities with weaving being the main occupation. The handloom weavers enjoyed skilled status and worked to commission. They could choose their own hours of work if

Socialism, Communism, Association A rose by another name



Since Marx is famously known as the author of *The Communist Manifesto*, it is generally assumed that 'communism' must have been his preferred term to refer to a post-capitalist society. But in the scattered sketches that can be found in his writings, it is more common to see his image of a future society described as an 'association'.

For example, in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels describe how the 'classes and class antagonisms' of bourgeois society would be replaced by 'an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'. And this is a manner of expression he stuck to in his later works. In *Capital*, for example, he imagines 'an association of free men (*sic*), working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as a one single social labour force'; and describes a 'higher form of society . . . in which the free development of every individual forms the ruling principle'.

The image here is not of citizens 'sacrificing' themselves for the 'good of society' but of individuals thoroughly at home in their social world, which is governed by the principle, 'From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'.

The social connection between these 'associated individuals' is clear from the outset, unlike the situation under capitalism, where the starting point is private capitalist firms pursuing their own profit in competition against each other. And the means of production are held in common, rather than confronting workers as the private property of other people. The connection between the individuals, and their relation to the means of production, is much like the situation among members of a family engaged in some project together through the use of their collective labour and commonly held resources. The relations between persons in such a case is not mediated by the exchange of things (money and commodities), and the interests of each individual are not in conflict.

Of course, we can also see such 'associated' behaviour to some extent under capitalism, as in the case of the various relationships and organisations people enter to pursue their interests and hobbies. But the scope of these associations are limited, since the vast majority of productive activities are done to receive the wages needed to survive—making them coercive rather than free. Every worker knows quite well the stark difference between freely entering into an association with others to pursue some interest and being compelled to work for wages.

The word 'free' shows up often when Marx describes a future society, using expressions like 'free and equal producers' and 'free men'. Moreover, there is no contradiction or conflict between the different pursuits of individuals, who are no longer divided by the competition imposed by capitalism, thus resulting in a 'large and harmonious system of free and co-operative labour'.

Such passages on a future association emphasise how human beings would freely and consciously interact with each other in pursuit of common goals that also benefit each other. The emphasis on the central role of individuals within a future society runs quite counter to the stereotypes that many people

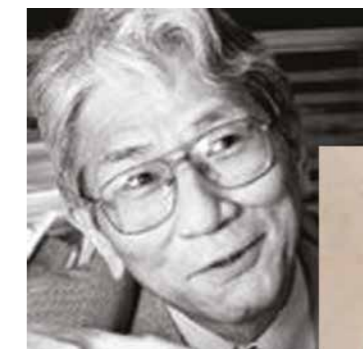
have of Marx's ideas and of the concepts of 'socialism' and 'communism'.

A great misfortune of the 20th century is that those terms became distorted by their association with state-capitalist countries that labelled themselves as socialist or communist to conceal their class-divided reality. A conceit that the foes of those countries were only too happy to oblige in as a convenient way to discredit all revolutionary ideas. Even today, when the term 'democratic socialism' has become trendy among younger generations, many still mistake the essence of socialism as economic intervention and regulation by the state.

From the passages quoted from Marx above, however, it should be clear that there is little need for a government and the actions of its politicians and bureaucrats when the subjects of society are free individuals consciously carrying out productive activities to meet common and individual goals. Quite unlike the state-capitalist model of a monolithic state that mobilises the 'masses' for its own aims, this would be an organic society made up of countless associations engaging in their respective activities and coordinating with each other to meet democratically determined needs. A 'state' would be completely superfluous to such free, associated individuals.

Some Marxian scholars like Paresh Chattopadhyay and Teinosuke Otani have used the term 'Association' or the 'associated mode of production' rather than 'socialism' or 'communism' to refer to a future society. The debate over what term to use is not that important, since one is still left with the task of explaining its fundamental content. But the image of Association (or a global collective of associations) may help counter views that have emphasised the collective at the expense of the individual—or viewed the gains on one side as a loss on the other. The perspective of Association also reveals how capitalism, for all its championing of individualism, in fact stifles the possibility of each worker to freely pursue personal interests and fulfil individual potential.

MIKE SCHAUERTE



Paresh Chattopadhyay

Teinosuke Otani





Inequality: same old story



When incoming left-wing Labour MP Zarah Sultana condemned the record of the Labour government in the Blair years, Tony's representatives on Earth swung into action, reciting the litany of his good works: record investment in the NHS, minimum wage, Sure Start, Human Rights Act, Freedom of Information Act (the one he regrets), etc. What they forgot to mention was that in large measure politics is where it is now due to his regime's greatest failing: its inability to increase the share of the national wealth for the poorest sections of society.

The Parliamentary report, *Income inequality in the UK: Briefing Paper Number 7484, 20 May 2019* (tinyurl.com/u32xecy), lays the picture out clearly. The Gini coefficient is a measure of overall inequality in a society. As the report notes, 'this summarises inequality in a single number which takes values between 0 and 100%. A higher value indicates greater inequality'. The trend line in the table in the summary is clear, in as much as the Thatcher years saw a significant increase in inequality, which the Blair/Brown years stabilised, albeit with a gentle increase during the first Labour term. (There is some scope for the effects of benefits and redistribution not being adequately accounted for in this measure, but as the report notes, this is at most likely to flatten the trend out, rather than alter its overall directions).

It is the detail, though, of this inequality that is significant. If we take a look at the comparative income distribution, we can see how the poorest sections of society fared worst. The chart on page 13 of the report looks at the gap between middle and lowest income groups (BHC = Before Housing Costs, AHC = After Housing Costs). So, although the rate of change slowed down, after the hammering of the Thatcher years, the Blair years still saw the lowest income group falling further behind middle income groups (and much further behind the very richest in society). This is despite the redistributive effects of welfare reforms in the period.

The report suggests the bigger divergence on the AHC ratio is due to the effect of home ownership and rises in the housing market values. So, the effect of the housing market was to aggravate relative poverty still further.

The other market involved was the labour market, as the Labour government began to invest in public services such as the NHS, staff, particularly skilled staff, began to push their wages up. The labour market does not register the importance of jobs, or social fairness, it merely looks at how difficult it would be to replace a given worker.

This is important: in an economy based on buying and selling using widespread division of labour, it becomes impossible to know the value of any given person's contribution to the final product. The actual value of goods can only be found when they are sold. The assumption is that employers will not use labour unless they have to, so everyone's contribution is equally essential to the production of the final product. Employers will pay whatever it takes to maintain and reproduce the willingness of a particular type of worker (possessing a particular type of skill) to do the work required.

Put another way, a Richard Branson or an Elon Musk could not have their millions and billions without office cleaners,

receptionists and the whole other myriad so-called unskilled clerical and manual jobs undertaken in the economy. As an example, if you needed a life-saving operation, you'd want the world's finest surgeon, but not at the price of being dragged by your hair to the theatre by the world's worst hospital porter, to find that it had been disinfected by the world's worst hospital cleaner.

The modern method of production sees an increasingly collective approach to generating wealth, but it is one in which the outputs are very unequally distributed. The work that is called unskilled actually requires very definite skill and aptitude to perform, but lacks formal qualifications and many people are available to perform that work, hence making it easy to replace staff and thus hold their wages down.

The people at the very bottom of society saw the Thatcher years make them poorer, and the Blair years do little to address it, the perception became clear that 'They are all the same' and that Labour cared more about the elite than it did about them, especially as the very rich could be seen to be getting very richer, and the middle income groups were gently drawing away.

The radical right-wing message that it was foreigners, who mostly came to work in the unskilled labour market, holding down their incomes, became a siren song that fuelled both a rise in the BNP vote during the Blair/Brown years, and also which in turn fuelled the Brexit coalition.

The Johnson government is pandering to this perception by their newly announced immigration policy. This policy is set to restrict immigration for low-paid jobs, setting a minimum income for incoming workers. Although, there has been talking about exempting particular industries that need labour, such as seasonal pickers.

The reality is that this policy is not about reducing overall migration, but reducing the legal rights of migrant workers, and opening the door to specifically use migrant labour that can be dismissed easily and sent away without any claim to those redistributive benefits that the Tories are set to try and hold down.

Although it goes unsaid in most quarters, the lack of improvement in the lives of many people coupled with the failure of a Labour government to make significant changes to their lives, underpins most of what is happening in politics today, even the rejection of the Corbyn Labour party, in the light of people's refusal to believe it would mean a significant change.

The Blair years' motto 'Education, education, education' was based on the premise that the way out of poverty is to get training/education/skills and get a higher paid job. But someone has to do the 'unskilled' work, it will never go away, and the wages system will always weigh against the people doing that kind of work. This disproportionately affects women, who tend to bear the brunt of child rearing, and so cannot develop the skills and experience to hold onto the higher-paid jobs.

The only way to improve the lot of the poorest in society is to lay claim to the wealth we collectively produce, and ensure that that wealth is put to our collective use as well.

PIK SMEET

they were willing to forgo some proportion of their earnings. Given that these workers had free time many were able to read and would talk about what they had read, discussing the American and French revolutions. A slump in the economy after the Napoleonic Wars when pay and conditions deteriorated drastically resulted in workers, particularly weavers in Scotland, seeking reforms from an uncaring gentry-controlled government already in fear of revolution.

The 'Committee of Organisation for Forming a Provisional Government' put up placards on Saturday 1 April, calling for an immediate national strike. Many in central Scotland came out in support the following week.

The proclamation began: 'Friends and Countrymen! Rouse from that state in which we have sunk for so many years, we are at length compelled from the extremity of our sufferings, and the contempt heaped upon our petitions for redress, to assert our rights at the hazard of our lives.'

And, it called for a rising:

'To show the world that we are not that lawless, sanguinary rabble which our oppressors would persuade the higher circles we are, but a brave and generous people determined to be free.'

One group of strikers decided that attack was the best form of defence. With the purpose of acquiring weapons, about twenty-five weavers, led by Andrew Hardie and John Baird, marched on the Carron Iron Works near Falkirk to capture weaponry which was manufactured there. Tragically for that group, due to earlier underground societies like the United Scotsmen, government spies were active which meant the

march on Carron was already known. The Army was given its own marching orders and when the two forces met the radicals began firing. After a few volleys, the cavalry flanked the rebels and the inevitable end was swift. And so ended the 'Battle' of Bonnymuir.

On the day of his execution, Hardie's words were:

'Yes, my countrymen, in a few minutes our blood shall be shed on this scaffold... for no other sin but seeking the legitimate rights of our ill-used and downtrodden beloved countrymen.'

An irate Sheriff ordered him to stop '*such violent and improper language*'.

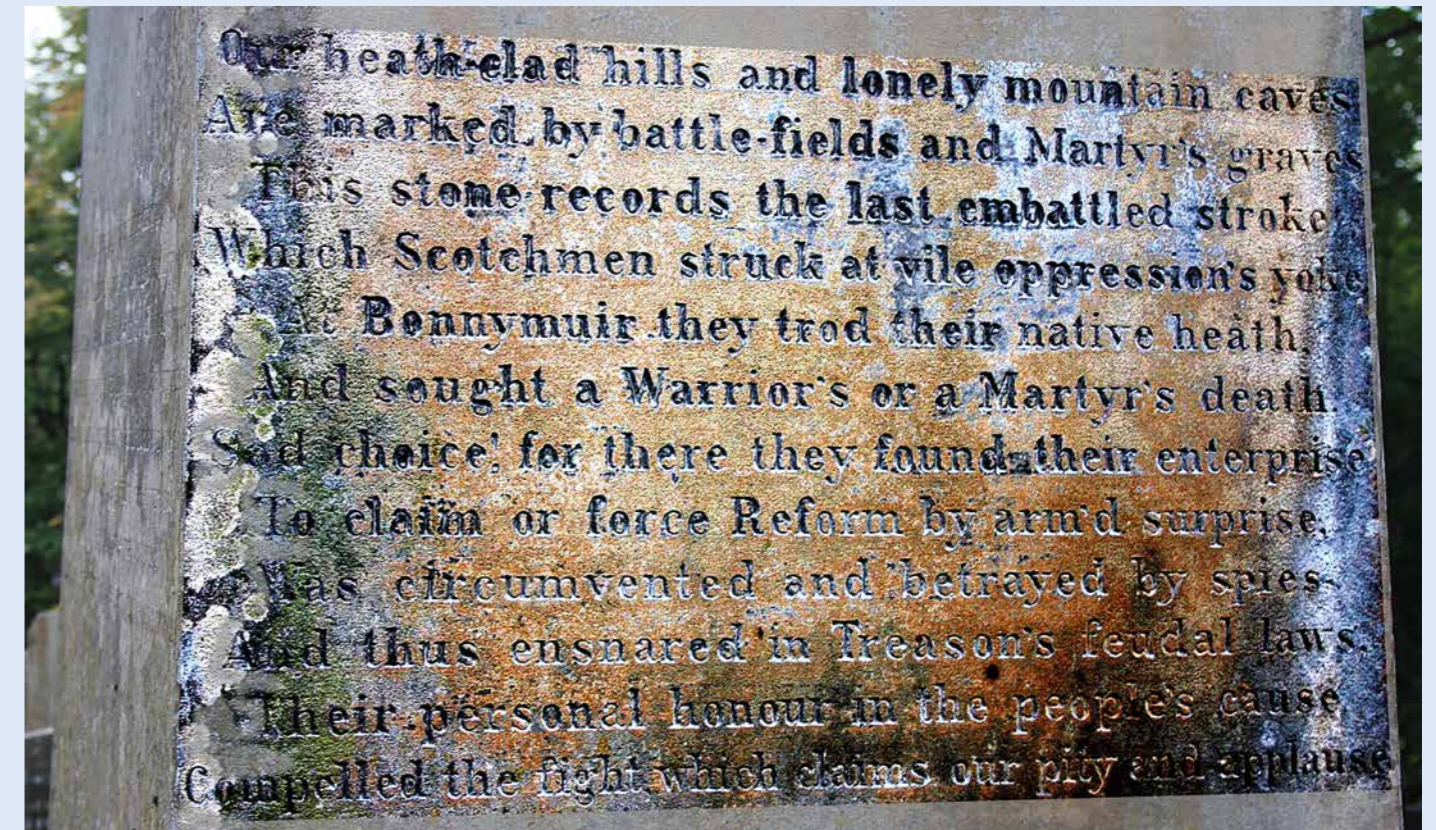
Hardie retorted:

'What we said to our countrymen, we intended to say no matter whether you granted us liberty or not. So we are now both done.'

1820 can be seen as the emergence of peoples' power later to manifest itself in the Chartist Movement. The rising should be seen in the context of ordinary people from all over a growing industrial Scotland being inspired to overthrow the government in order to secure their rights and better working conditions.

We shall let the reader judge which historic event deserves to be remembered and celebrated.

ALJO



Who's going to run Irish Capitalism?



The Irish electorate went to the polls on 8 February 2020 to elect a government to rule over them. The outgoing regime was based on a pact between the two traditional ruling parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil; the actual construction was a novel 'confidence and supply' arrangement whereby Fine Gael actually formed the government (together with some independent members of the Irish parliament) that was supported externally in any crucial parliamentary votes by Fianna Fáil. In return for propping up the government, Fianna Fáil had an effective veto over government policy (a deal not too dissimilar from the recent voting pact between the Tories and the DUP in Westminster).

In the run-up to the election, Fine Gael (who had the advantage of being able to set the date), might have considered themselves to be in a strong electoral position to be returned to government. They could claim to have turned around the economy from the disastrous crash of 2009 when Fianna Fáil had been in power and furthermore were seen to have performed competently in the difficult Brexit negotiations and successfully withstood Tory Brexiteer demands that Ireland facilitate the UK's withdrawal by being flexible about the operation of the Good Friday agreement.

Fianna Fáil themselves were also expecting to do well, hoping that the electorate had forgotten/forgiven their inept handling of the economy in 2009 and anticipating some credit for aiding Fine Gael in restoring the country's economic fortunes. In the end, Sinn Féin have generally been acclaimed as being the clear winners having taken the largest share of the vote of any party (25 percent) and having won nearly the most seats (37). They are left in a quandary though because while obtaining the largest mandate, they still have far fewer seats than required to have a parliamentary majority (minimum 80 seats).

Sinn Féin success

Sinn Féin's success has been attributed to the two basic issues of housing and health and the failure of the Fine Gael/Fianna Fáil government to solve these long-running problems. The housing crisis manifests itself most acutely in the homeless who sleep out rough in Ireland's major cities, night after night, summer and winter. However, at most 10,000 people are actually homeless, which while a large figure in itself, is still a very small fraction of the total population of the republic. In terms of widespread impact, the real issue is the very high cost of houses compared to wages/salaries and as a consequence very expensive rents. Over the last 40 years, governments of all persuasions have scaled back their commitment to social housing so now it is the private sector (i.e. private capitalism) in the form of developers or landlords who supply most of the housing needs either for purchase or renting. As with any commodity, scarcity drives the price up and the limited supply of new housing to the market has been exacerbated by high demand partly resulting from a strong increase in the population. Rents are so high that some workers can be paying over 50 percent of their take-home salary in rent leaving little opportunity to save. Housing is so expensive, particularly in

the Dublin region, that many workers are forced to live in cheaper dormitory commuting towns and spend 3 hours or more on return trips daily to work. It means the actual length of the working day (not unreasonably measured from time going out the front door in the morning to time coming back in the evening) can be as long as it was 100 years ago.

This clearly unsatisfactory state of affairs led to great anger amongst the younger electorate, feeling excluded from the housing market, and it is from this group that Sinn Féin primarily drew support. Health too was a major issue. Currently its provision is a mix of public provision, which is free, and a private component which must be paid by obtaining health insurance. The main problem is the very long waiting time for public patients. Here the electoral benefit to Sinn Féin was less clear cut as there is a resigned acceptance amongst the public that no party is likely to make any meaningful inroad into this matter at least in the short term. It's a powerful illustration that even when the economy is going strong, some basic needs of workers in housing and health remain unsatisfied by capitalism.

Reformism before republicanism

That Sinn Féin would be the primary beneficiary of voter anger was not immediately obvious prior to the election. In fact they performed very badly in local and European elections just 7 months previously and themselves were really hoping just to consolidate their vote. The party was founded in 1905 and can claim to be the oldest party in the state. It has gone through many manifestations over the last 115 years and at various times has adopted either left-wing or right-wing ideologies; the situation being confused by the fact that sometimes rival organisations have simultaneously claimed the name Sinn Féin. Its primary policy was always the establishment of an Irish nation separate from England which since 1921 has meant repudiating the border in Ireland. Since the 1980s, it began to define itself as a 'socialist republican' party with the aim of establishing socialism (never exactly

spelled out but generally taken to imply more widespread state ownership and involvement in the economy) across a single, united, 32-county Ireland. Over that era though its main role was to articulate the political demands of the Provisional IRA.

Since the millennium, the 'socialism' word has been quietly jettisoned as Sinn Féin became more electorally conscious after the IRA ceasefire; the jargon now is to talk about radical, people-focused policies so as not to scare off potential voters. Even more surprisingly the republicanism element of the party's programme has become more muted which is a big departure for a party that fully justified and supported the Provisional IRA campaign from 1969 onwards. While formally a United Ireland, above all else, remains its primary campaigning plank, now all the party wants any prospective coalition parties to agree to is preparations for a border poll at some future undefined time.

Another facet of interest from the election has been the decline of the Irish Labour party. Once the only alternative leftist political force to the two main centre-right parties and the self-proclaimed voice of the trade union movement, it now has a parliamentary strength in single figures and an ageing and declining membership. It has been supplanted by other more radical groups such as the Social Democrats (slightly more to the left than Labour), the Solidarity-People before Profit group (an amalgam of various movements from the Trotskyite tradition) and a number of non-party left-leaning individuals. The Green Party also did very well in the election obtaining 11 seats reflecting the high profile given to climate change and the need for sustainability in the media and the undeniable fact that when the economy is going well, a certain part of the electorate can 'afford' to treat this issue seriously.

Coalitions

Since the election, the focus has been on the formation of a new government. With the fragmented nature of the results, no single party is anywhere close to forming a government

on its own and any realistic combination will involve at least three parties, two of which will have to be drawn from the big three of Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The outcome is still unclear as both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have publicly ruled out forming a coalition with Sinn Féin and they seem reluctant to combine with each other too. Some of this rhetoric may be genuinely ideologically driven and doubtless some is simply part of a negotiating ploy prior to the point at which an agreed programme of government must be settled on between whichever parties go into government. As of mid-March, the most likely option would seem to be a Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael coalition propped up by some other groups. So while Sinn Féin can correctly claim to be the largest party in terms of vote share won, it has no obvious path to power at the moment. All it can do is decry 'failed right-wing policies' and promise 'radical change'.

For some commentators, the election of 2020 heralded the long-awaited coming of a left/right split in Irish politics with the left-wing option for government involving Sinn Féin, other small left-wing groups, the Green party and 'progressive' independents while in this scenario, the right wing would be an amalgamation of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. Leaving aside certain important practical impediments to this outcome, it ignores the fact that Sinn Féin (as with most successful political parties under capitalism) is flexible with regard to ideology and election commitments. It certainly positions itself to the left of the two other main parties but this is clearly relative and adjustable leaving huge scope for manoeuvre. The formation of a government with Fianna Fáil is still a possibility as shown by the fact that Sinn Féin has been part of the on-off devolved government of Northern Ireland for the last 10 years with an even more implausible coalition partner, the DUP. Over this duration, it has been 'business as usual' in the North.

As with most elections in countries that have parliamentary systems of government, we in the Socialist Party have the frustrating task of being mainly observers rather than significant participants. While many political commentators have spoken of the 'historic nature' of Sinn Féin now being the largest party in the island of Ireland, north and south, by vote share, this recent election is fundamentally no different to all those that have preceded it. The capitalist system has failed the workers of Ireland in terms of some very basic human needs and a large number of them are angry and disenchanted with the established parties of government. As with many other recent elections throughout Europe, the people have gone for seemingly radical alternatives in the hope that they can succeed where others have failed. Unfortunately they are mistaken in this hope as any party that accepts the fundamental underpinnings of our current world system (the need for money, profit, countries, leaders, etc.) cannot hope to resolve the crises that inevitably arise from this. The system goes on and even the fact that it takes so long to form a new government is a small demonstration of the irrelevance of conventional political parties to people's day-to-day lives.

KEVIN CRONIN