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socialist standard

August 2006 Vol. 102 No. 1224 £1

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

Rebranding Earth



Globalisation - the new
language of poverty



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The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on **Saturday 5 August** at the address below. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the editorial committee at: The Socialist Party, 52 Clapham High street, London SW4 7UN.
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Introducing The Socialist Party

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

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

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

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

Editorial

More slaughter in the Middle East

Once again in the Middle East innocent workers are being killed and useful structures destroyed. The immediate cause was the capture in a raid from Lebanon of two Israeli soldiers but the ultimate issue was, once again, who controls this oil-rich region: the US and its allies or various local elites?

All states are artificial and illegitimate but Israel is particularly so. Set up by colonists from Europe on the basis of fables recounted in a book supposedly emanating from a god, it has been armed and financed by the United States as its only reliable ally in the region. Over the years it has acted as America's gendarme there to deal with sections of the local Arab ruling classes who have sought to challenge US domination. These sections, in their turn, have identified Israel for what it is and have sought to destroy it and have been able to win considerable popular support.

This is not to say that Israel is under direct US control. The rulers of Israel have their own agenda and can, and do, act independently of their protector. But that's a price the US has to pay to avoid sending its own troops to fight and die there. The US would like some compromise solution between Israel and local Arab elites but in the meantime gives Israel a virtual free hand, only issuing ritual appeals to it to exercise restraint.

Hezbollah, the Shiite militia in Lebanon, is armed and financed by two states whose regime the US has vowed to change: Iran and Syria. It is entirely possible that the present crisis was deliberately provoked by Iran, which has ambitions to be the dominant regional power, as a means of bringing counter-pressure on the US in the diplomatic trial of strength going on over its nuclear programme, a means of showing that it too is not without bargaining counters. Israel, incidentally, is without

doubt already a nuclear power, which shows up the US hypocrisy over the spread of nuclear weapons.

So, as a conflict over which states and ruling classes should dominate the region, no working class interest is involved except in so far as it is they who are its innocent victims and need the killing, maiming and destruction to stop. Socialists are always spontaneously on the side of the oppressed against the oppressors and the massive use of overwhelming force by the state of Israel clearly exposes it as the oppressor. But just because we sympathise with the victims of Israeli oppression does not mean that we favour the solutions popular amongst them.

A Palestinian state would be a capitalist state. "Anti-imperialism" is the slogan of local elites who wish to dominate the region in place of the US, a situation which would still leave the mass of the population there exploited and oppressed with the eternal problem of finding enough money to buy the things they need to live.

Capitalism is a war-prone society with a built-in clash of interests between states over markets, sources of raw materials, trade routes and strategic points to protect these. In the Middle East the conflict is over oil, and strategic points to protect its supply and transport, which has already led to many wars there.

The only lasting way out is to get rid of capitalism and replace it by a world society of common ownership and democratic control. On that basis, the resources of the world, including oil, could be extracted and used for the benefit of all the people of the world. Poverty and misery in the Middle East, as elsewhere, could be ended once and for all. The waste of arms and the horrors of war would disappear.

Socialism is, quite literally and without exaggeration, the hope of humanity.

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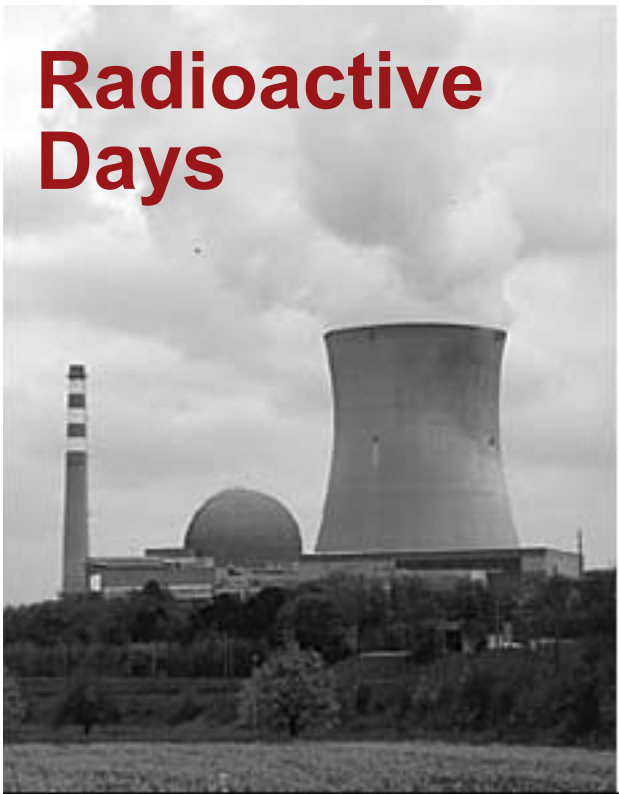
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Radioactive Days



Anyone who expressed shock, surprise, horror or helpless mirth at the government's decision to give the go-ahead to a new round of nuclear power stations in the UK deserves a slap and a strong injunction to wake up and smell the plutonium. This was always going to happen, so get used to it. Some people may have thought, in the wake of Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, and the revelations of gross and grotesque safety infringements by nuclear companies in the 70's and 80's, that nuclear's goose was cooked, and that public opinion was irreversibly set against its comeback. Such optimists underestimate the power of creeping propaganda by the state and overestimate the collective memory of the public. What, besides a lot of bilge about new safety procedures and new ideas about waste disposal, has really swung it for the nuclear lobby is the increasing fear that we, in the West, are either going to be hostages to the mullahs in Iran or those commies in Venezuela for oil, or hostages to the Russian mafia for gas (who have shown themselves quite capable of turning off the taps if they don't get the price they want). Blair's government have played a clever game of buttering up the public with so-called energy reviews, which were really about acclimatizing public opinion to the inevitable. The greens have been effectively neutralized, being unable to find a way out of the environmental frying pan of fossil fuels without hitting the fire of nuclear fission, while emerging research into wind power has set back alarmingly the time necessary for this technology to start being a net carbon saver, from an estimate of 18 months by the wind turbine industry itself to between 8 and 16 years by independent researchers, on a projected 25 year turbine life span (New Scientist, July 8).

And could there be another and darker reason why nuclear is back on the agenda and the same money is not going to be spent either on renewables, or even more sensibly, insulating houses and finding ways to reduce consumption? The original reason for the nuclear programme was that not only could you run steam turbines with the resulting water vapour but you could also build bombs to vaporize your political and economic rivals, and the reasoning still holds good, in a world of ageing nuclear arsenals and an emergent superpower, China, whose expected ruthlessness in suppressing global competitors may be judged by its ruthlessness in suppressing its own people.

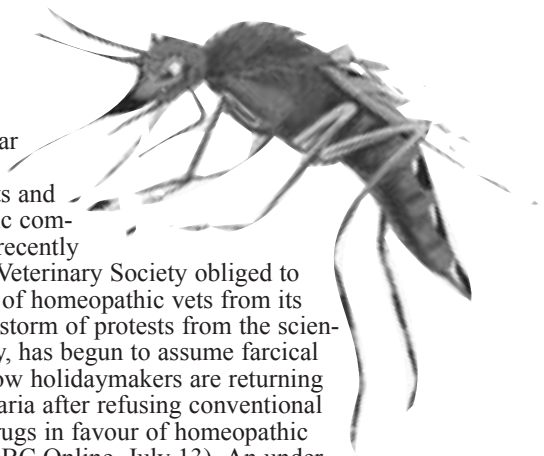
But the bitterest pill for environmentalists to swallow is that the government's case on nuclear is actually pretty hard to fault. Renewables provide about 4 per cent of the UK's energy supply and the most massive expansion programme imaginable is not going to increase that amount to a significant level for decades,

whereas the threat of strangulation from global suppliers of oil and gas is immediate and stark, as are the spiralling price rises. While the USA and the UK may with impunity invade Iraq when its chieftain starts monkeying around with oil supplies, the same tactic is hardly going to work in Venezuela, heavily backed by China, or in Russia, which nobody has ever invaded without immediately and solemnly wishing they hadn't. There are no other emergent technologies. Fusion is still decades away, and always will be, according to the old joke. Cold fusion is, according to the accepted wisdom, just a joke. As hydro goes bigger, the cracks in the dams start to appear, much to the embarrassment of Chinese engineers, and the energy of wind appears to be best harnessed by building on, and effectively destroying, millions of tons of peat bog, itself a massive carbon sink.

If socialism were established tomorrow, the question of nuclear energy would take a back-seat, behind more pressing questions of food production. But it would re-emerge, amid a hotly disputed debate over energy consumption and reduction. A socialist society which had to find energy out of nowhere and with no time to develop renewables, might conceivably go nuclear, at least for a time. But it is not a racing certainty, or even an ambling probability. If one were to take away the factors of capitalist competitive production which so completely influence the present controversy one would be left with a more rational basis for planning, which would take into account global minimum energy requirements, both domestic and industrial, rather than global optimum industrial performance to outdo business rivals. If Europe, for example, didn't have to stay one jump ahead of South East Asia and China in manufacturing stakes, and if China wasn't in such an all-fired rush to industrialise simply to compete on global markets, the question of energy might be approached in an altogether calmer and more globally sustainable way. But in capitalism, the energy question is really one of global dominance. The power at stake is really political and economic. Whether the source of that power is from nuclear fission, fossil fuels, or farting Friesians, is entirely beside the point.

The Sting

The ongoing war between mainstream scientists and the homeopathic community, which recently saw the Royal Veterinary Society obliged to withdraw a list of homeopathic vets from its website after a storm of protests from the scientific community, has begun to assume farcical proportions. Now holidaymakers are returning home with malaria after refusing conventional anti-malarial drugs in favour of homeopathic 'alternatives' (BBC Online, July 13). An undercover investigation by the group Sense About Science and BBC's Newsnight programme revealed that homeopathic consultants were telling people they didn't need the 'horrible' conventional drugs and could safely use homeopathic medications, which on analysis turned out to be 99.99 per cent water with a virtually undetectable level of quinine. When challenged by Newsnight, the clinics claimed this was a mistake, and that clients were told to consult their doctors, a claim not supported by the secretly recorded interview transcripts. However, all this doesn't seem quite fair on the hardworking homeopaths. Being in a sympathetic mood, Pathfinders offers the following explanation: what the clinics really meant to say was that their remedies were indeed perfectly effective, but only against homeopathic mosquitoes. The fact that mosquitoes are usually in the habit of delivering large and potentially deadly doses of malaria is a disappointing reflection on their unchristian natures but this can hardly be blamed on homeopathic clinics, who are only trying to help.



Galloway defended

Dear Editors

Pik Smeets' article (July *Socialist Standard*) is yet another criticism of George Galloway which to my mind, although there are perhaps some valid points made, is not really very helpful in the immediate struggle that we of the Left need to advance against the creeping neo-fascism excreting from Number 10 and Washington D.C.

Galloway, regardless of his personal motives, is a voice in Parliament roundly criticizing the murderous policies of this mutant 'ersatz' Labour Government and its Washington cohorts. Where are the other voices? Galloway is able to speak to the masses via the media. Maybe he's not a one hundred percent 'kosher' socialist but ordinary people are hearing him and know about him and are thinking about what he is saying. 'It's no damn good refining our socialist ideas, concepts and understandings amongst ourselves. Socialists need to be out in the community at large offering the light of reason to the people. Galloway, for all his faults, is doing that.

LEO ALIFERIS (by email)

Reply:

The message Galloway projects is hardly an advance for the working class. We refrained from retelling his ghastly support for Saddam Hussein: he went so far when he appeared on Big Brother as to claim that the Iraqis supported and were happy with that vile old-style fascist dictator; he even saluted Hussein to his face for his "strength [his] courage, [his] indefatigability". Far from being a voice for the oppressed in the mass media he is the voice of wealth and power in

the Middle East, and his role in the workers' movement is to poison it. Ordinary people hear this poison and think it has something to do with socialism. He and his ilk are just as great an enemy to the spread of socialist understanding as George > Bush, and the Socialist Party must oppose them - *Editors*.

Ban the ultra-right?

Dear Editors

I read your article titled "the case against censorship" (March *Socialist Standard*). I am also in favour of freedom of speech. It is true that Islamists and racists as individuals should be free to express their viewpoints and that atheists and socialists should also be free to criticise them by any unconditional means they find appropriate.

Islam's "prophet" knew how to read and write and wrote the Quran that reflects the tribal beliefs of barbarian Arabs who lived in pre-feudal socio-economic conditions but announced that was unable to read and write and that the "holy" book had been "posted" by god to his address in Saudi Arabia.

Racists deny equal rights for non "white" and non "English" citizens of this country and want to apply force and remove them from this bullshit country and also answer workers' and socialists' demands for the right of freedom of speech, press and organization by police force, jail, torture and murder exactly like terrorist Muslims. In other words, they both represent social forces that want to add more dictatorship to the present level of dictatorship of capitalists and their murderous suppressive British regime.

I think that those Islamic organizations

that support and organize terrorist activity and also "white founded" organizations that preach for "white power" or even "English power", should be banned from doing activity, since every year quite a few "whites" and a few more "non whites" are killed by these terrorist organizations.

When we can make workers accept that ultra right, whether it is Muslim terrorist or racist fascist, should not exist as an organization we would deprive the capitalist ruling class of the use of the ultra right to suppress the looming socialist revolution by using these ultra reactionary forces as its political and suppression machine representatives.

SIAMAK HAGHIGHAT, London

Reply :

We are opposed to appealing to the capitalist state to ban any political ideas. It doesn't work anyway - *Editors*

Civil War in Uganda

Dear Editors,

There is a war which has been going on the Northern part of Uganda for now 20 years. This is a war between the Ugandan Government and the Lord's Resistance Army rebel armed forces led by one Joseph Kony.

It is clear that any solution resulting from violence or confrontation is not lasting. It is only through peaceful means that we can develop better understanding between ourselves. Though lies and falsehood may deceive people temporarily and the use of force may control human beings physically, it is only through proper understanding, fairness and mutual respect that human beings can be genuinely convinced and satisfied.

There is one world and we exist as one

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Globalisation - what does it mean?

We begin a two-part article on the continuing surge in capitalist globalisation. This month we deal with the globalisation of capital

Following the downfall of state capitalism in Eastern Europe the idea of one global market soon found common cause in neo-conservative and neo-liberal circles. Indeed, for these ideologists of capitalism the world market only became truly global once the former state capitalist regimes threw open their doors to private finance and capital investment from the G7 nations. Obviously, for such thinking to take hold it had to ignore a multitude of historical facts concerning the economic development of capitalism and its eventual transformation into a world system.

In 1865, for example the first global regulatory agency was formed with the creation of the International Telegraph Union, along with the first global medical resource, which we know as the Red Cross. Also, if globalisation only took place when the G7 nations became G8 (with Russia joining) then the new 'thinkers' need to explain how two wars commonly referred to as world wars were fought over who was to dominate access to global raw materials and a market that was already global. Another historical fact that is largely ignored is that despite supposed ideological differences the trade between the state capitalist regimes and the rest of the world increased throughout the Cold War.

This is how the economist Keynes confirmed - rather belatedly - in the aftermath of World War One, the process of globalisation that had gone on until then:

"What an extraordinary episode in the economic progress of man that age

which came to end in August 1914! . . . The inhabitant of London could order by telephone, sipping his morning tea in bed, the various products of the whole earth, in such quantity as he might see fit, and reasonably expect their early delivery upon his doorstep; he could at the same moment and by the same means adventure his wealth in the natural sources and new enterprises of any quarter of the world, and share, without exertion or even trouble, in their prospective fruits and advan-

“The Cold War itself proved to be a nice little earner”

tages; or he could decide to couple the security of his fortunes with the good faith of the townspeople of any substantial municipality in any continent that fancy or information might recommend."

Coming from Keynes it would be rather naive to expect him to describe the wave of globalisation that had taken place around the turn of the twentieth century in terms other than pro-capitalist ones. For unlike Marx, who saw the main instrument for social change originating with the class conscious workers, Keynes was convinced throughout his life that the capitalist class held the centre stage, albeit with the need of some interventionist help from the state. Marx had also predicted the potential for

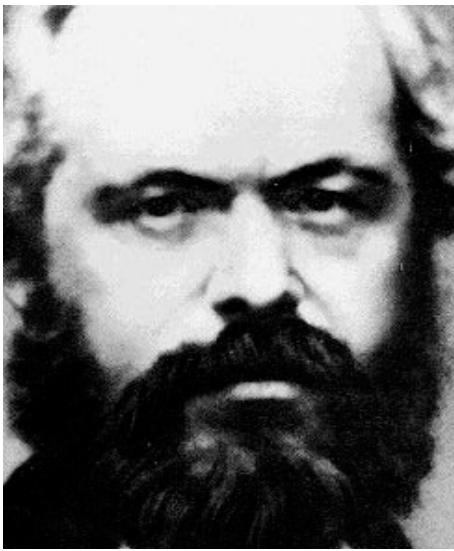
capitalism to become a global system, with its attendant economic, political and social consequences, when he and Engels drew up the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. And he confirmed, far earlier than anyone else, the trend for capitalism to evolve towards economic interdependency and globalisation when *Das Capital* was published in 1867.

Spoils of war

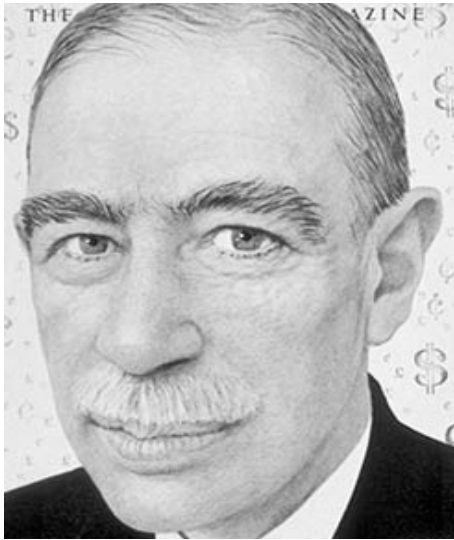
The arguments over the benefits of 'protectionism' versus free trade that existed during the nineteenth century, and then in the periods just before and then after the First World War, were never entirely resolved within the capitalist class one way or another. Fierce arguments raged with various policy initiatives and reversals, though for most of the dominant states of the time (such as Britain) what passed for 'free trade' gained something of an ascendancy by stealth.

But in terms of the globalisation of the system, the most crucial event took place rather later, towards the end of another war caused by competition over economic power and military interests - World War Two. Significantly, in the summer of 1944 at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire the gangster representatives of 44 countries held a meeting to hammer out a deal on global trade and sharing the spoils of (the latest) war. This included the creation of the World Bank and the IMF and the initial setting up of a General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), with the latter coming into force in 1948.

Although these new institutions



Above: Marx predicted the potential for capitalism to become a global system, whilst Keynes, below, convinced the capitalist class held the centre stage with help from the state. Botom: The meeting of 44 countries at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire



eased the existing rules on tariffs and the movement of currency, by seeking common ground on exports and imports and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), they had no powers to control new forms of protectionism that had been instigated by the major powers in order to maintain their market share and economic dominance. And this was reflected in what happened shortly after the Second World War ended, when the US introduced the Marshall Plan in 1949 involving \$13.5 billion of loans by the US government to near-bankrupt European economies. All told \$90 billion was steered towards 16 countries that agreed to move towards currency convertibility, lowered trade tariffs, who promoted exports to the US and who were 'tough on communism'. This not only meant that the US export market was protected in Western Europe but was also, in retrospect the first economic warning shots in the start of the Cold War.

Cold War Economics

The Cold War itself proved to be a nice little earner for those countries in the "developing" world who allied themselves to either East or West, with most of the proceeds ending up in arms deals or directly into the pockets of corrupt politicians and bureaucrats. Not that this bothered the developed countries, for during this period of Cold War economics many developing and undeveloped countries found themselves accepting loan agreements whether they wanted them or not - and with very favourable terms of borrowing at very low rates of interest, plus long-term payback dates. They seemed at the time to have little to lose by becoming debtor nations. As for the creditor nations, both East and West, their aim during the cold war was to increase their hegemony and market share by making the client debtor nations militarily and financially dependent on them as creditor states and to gain the upper hand over their competitors.

The loans themselves came from a variety of sources: manufacturing and financial businesses, banks, donor states, the IMF and the World Bank being the main lenders. Much of this money was lent under a 'no risk' guarantee covered by Export Credit Agreements (ECA), where individual donor states with their export agencies would underwrite the loans through aid contracts - specifying that the capital investment could only be spent

through named companies established in the donor state.

For instance, the Nigerian government could have decided to build a university, and could approach a donor state like the UK to finance the project, both seeking agreement as to the profitability of the aid. The UK government would then stipulate that the university could to be built by a UK developer and equipped by British manufacturers and key posts staffed with British-trained personnel. Should the Nigerian government default on their repayments of the loan what would usually happen is that the UK would agree to pay off the loan under ECA if the Nigerian government issued a bond tied to a percentage of Nigerian oil exports in order to cover the amount owed. This would ensure the capital invested stayed in circulation via petrodollars, despite the losses incurred. Obviously, deals like this could only continue whilst there was sufficient confidence in the strength of the US-driven Western economies.

Crisis of Over-Accumulation

During the early 1970s this changed dramatically when loss of confidence over escalating costs of the Vietnam War became evident with many countries selling off their dollar reserves in favour of gold. Unable to withstand this pressure the US came off the Gold Standard in 1971 and allowed the fixed exchange rate system that was pegged to the dollar to collapse. The price of gold increased and there followed a period of financial instability which, in essence, reflected the return of economic crisis in the sphere of production, with economic downturns in major western economies and growing unemployment. It was at this time that the main oil-producing cartel dominated by capitalists in the Middle East (OPEC) decided to quadruple their oil prices. These events eventually flooded the North American and European financial markets with vast amounts of accumulated petrodollars searching for profitable investment that was difficult to find in the more 'traditional markets' of the post-war period. Due to the European Economic Community (EEC) at the time being insufficiently organised or integrated to attract the massive amounts of capital in the OPEC countries, some of it filtered towards the Pacific Rim, commonly referred to as the 'Asian Tigers'.

PROTECTIONISM

An economic policy designed to actively restrict imports into a country, through means such as 'quotas' (which only allow for the import of certain maximum numbers of goods in a given period), or 'tariffs' (which place a tax on imports to make them less attractive to importers). Advocates of protectionism, such as British Tory politician Joseph Chamberlain a century ago, have typically argued that it is a means for protecting domestic industry and agriculture from foreign competition. Historically, it has been most actively and aggressively taken up by state capitalist countries of the political far right (e.g. Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in the 1930s) and of the far left (Soviet Union, China, etc) when attempting to challenge other, more dominant, states.

FREE TRADE

This is a situation whereby the free flow of goods and services is not interfered with by state intervention and measures such as protectionism. In practice it is an idealist conception within capitalism that is never attained completely because of the active role of the state in modern capitalist nations, but advocates of free trade argue that the nearer economies get to this situation, the greater world growth and prosperity will be as there will be fewer restrictions on production and trade. For obvious reasons, it is a policy favoured more by powerful, dominant economies with a competitive advantage - but even then, some selected elements of protectionism may remain where needed (e.g. the US economy today).



India and China are being reshaped in the interests of capitalism

With the exception of the Multifibre Agreement drawn up by GATT, much of this investment for Asia hit a variety of protectionist barriers on the export of capital. Although GATT tried to get around monetary restrictions with the introduction of the SWIFT system for electronic inter-bank fund transfers worldwide and other measures, the pressure for change in currency regulations intensified throughout the 1980s as capitalism's trade cycle returned with a vengeance with plummeting production and soaring unemployment.

Out of this emerged what came to be called the 'Washington Consensus' instigated by the neo-liberals within the US Treasury, IMF and World Bank who advocated a programme to free up capital assets by: privatising state owned monopolies; reducing personal and business taxation; deregulating financial institutions; removing restrictions on FDI; and reducing public spending, particularly on welfare benefits. Urged on by the collapse of the state capitalist regimes who could not compete economically or militarily any longer with the dominant Western economies, the pressure continued to intensify for deregulation of currency movement and the abandonment of GATT, and its replacement by the World Trade Organisation. This eventually took place in 1995 and under it trade and the movement of currency and capital assets has had a much more straightforward path to profitable markets.

Deregulation of currency movement and the removal of restrictions on FDI, however, proved to be just too late for the developing countries on the Pacific Rim. By 1997 these countries had found their credit was severely overextended, delivering a lower rate of profit than predicted by the pundits and speculators of the financial institutions. The unintended consequence of the crisis in South East Asia was the acceleration of the movement of currency into other areas still - like China and India - where there were better prospects of profits.

This is the nature of capitalism for the accumulation of capital is dependent on economic growth, regardless of the risk attached, and is essential to the workings of a system that puts competition and the pursuit of profit, at each link in the chain - from production to distribution and eventual sale to the consumer - above all else.

Risks

With the velocity facilitated by the internet, clearly the overall economic trend is

towards short-term profits through FDI, currency speculation and by squeezing market share of competitors, particularly in manufacturing and services. But that does not mean that the developed countries are solely concentrating their investments in the developing countries - far from it. The greater volume of trade and investment is still between the G8 countries themselves who, forced by global market conditions, have taken into account the relative economic, political and social stability of the developed world, compared to what they would sometimes gain from

“China is using 47 percent of the world's cement to complete the damming of the Yangzi”

relatively precarious investment in any of the developing, or even undeveloped countries.

Generally, what is most noticeable about this economic activity is that all the developing countries targeted by the World Bank, IMF and the WTO were selected because they have access to sufficient energy and water supplies to sustain a short-term industrialisation programme, rather than sustained long-term growth. For example, China is scouring the world for all the uranium ore available and every drop of oil necessary to accomplish its aim of overtaking Japan and becoming the main industrial nation in South East Asia and second to the US globally. And China is currently finding it very difficult to meet the increased demand for electricity and for bottled and industrial water, and consequently using 47 percent of the world's cement to complete the damming of the Yangzi, and meet their targets on urbanisation and industrial capacity. In effect the Chinese have soon come to realise that without sufficient energy and water their plans for long-term growth are unachievable. Although this economic targeting over energy and water resources is undoubtedly a high-risk strategy, and has all the potential for military conflicts over essential resources, it is one explanation why the emphasis is on short-term profit and speculation.

What is also apparent is that the freeing up of the movement on capital has not entirely been accompanied by a corresponding deregulation in the movement of labour. Indeed, the restrictions on immigration have been tightened in some cases, and strictly enforced by some countries to hold back the flood of economic, and mostly illegal, immigrants chasing the movement of capital in the developed and developing countries. These phenomenon have led to the growth in human trafficking - and the casualties are being found suffocated in the back of lorries at Dover harbour, or drowned on a beach in Morecambe Bay or even crushed by a train in the Eurotunnel.

There are also other risks associated with the pursuit of industrial growth in the developing world, the most obvious one being the spread of AIDS, particularly in Africa where it has been helped along by a tenfold increase in the transportation of commodities. And then there's the risk that the increase in global pollution and the onset of global warming will put severe pressure on the relocation of coastal communities. A less immediately obvious risk is of an increase in capitalist industrial growth in some countries facilitating and encouraging the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction and their eventual use in competitive power struggles between states. These and other risk factors can only accelerate as the demands for more energy and water increase in line with industrial growth.

The reasons why these patterns of risky economic activity are so pronounced are many and varied, but all are nonetheless based on capitalism's inherent competitive drive to maximise profits regardless of the consequences. The actual growth in economic development in parts of the developing world attracting investment has been on a tremendous scale with developing countries like Brazil, China and India sucking in vast amounts of capital to increase their infrastructure and manufacturing base. In particular the annual percentage increase in GDP for China (9.8) and India (8.1) illustrates how these economies are being dramatically reshaped in the interests of capitalism. ■

BRIAN JOHNSON

Next month: the impact that the continuing surge in globalisation is having on people in the developing and undeveloped countries.

Foreign takeovers: a non-issue



From a recent Amicus handout urging the boycotting of Peugeot

A recent poll shows public opinion in Britain is becoming increasingly perturbed by the changing ownership of the companies that make up the British economy, but does it matter to workers who owns the company that exploits them?

The poll, conducted by Harris Interactive at the beginning of June, found that the acquisition of British companies by those based in other countries is causing major concern, with "more than two thirds of people saying it is now 'too easy' for overseas predators to acquire businesses here," (Financial Times, 19 June 2006) and urging government intervention.

The poll comes after 18 months of intense acquisition and take-over activity on the London Stock Exchange that reaped a cash bonanza for the shareholders of a number of well-known companies and shows no sign of abating. The feverish activity has been fuelled, in large part, by foreign-based companies buying UK companies in deals that in the first 10 months of 2005 were worth £70 billion - twice the value of such deals for the whole of 2004. In one week alone in November 2005, four potential deals involving P&O, Pilkington, O2 and Mowlem were reputedly worth £24 billion.

More recent events have aggravated the unease. The announcement that Peugeot was to close its Ryton car factory, destroying 2,300 jobs, was accompanied by persistent rumours that Gazprom, the Russian oil and gas company, is about to take over Centrica in a period of rising gas and electricity prices. The timing of the Harris poll also coincided with the finalisation of the Spanish company Ferrovial's bid for the British Airports Authority, which owns Heathrow, Gatwick and Stanstead airports, among others.

The reason behind all this is not difficult to discover. As noted in the Observer on 6 November last year, "The reason for the activity is simple: five years of belt tightening following the technology boom has left UK plc in robust health. Returns on equity are higher than they have been for years and cash generation has been strong, leaving balance sheets healthy." Since profits in these companies have remained 'healthy' it is evident that it is the working class who have experienced the 'belt tight-

ening' - foregoing improvements in living standards, motivated, one suspects, by the fear of losing their jobs. Growth in company profits in the last few years is not the outcome of a general increase in sales but a consequence of cost savings. All too often these savings are secured by holding down wages, intensifying working conditions and, where necessary, terminating jobs - the destruction of the livelihood of men and women with all the misery and dislocation this entails.

“Globalisation is the newest name for a process that has been ongoing since capitalism was first established”

Behind the concern expressed in the survey is the misguided belief among working people that they have a stake in making sure that companies retain their British ownership. Many appear to hold the view that foreign companies cannot be trusted to maintain existing employment levels and have the unsubstantiated conviction that workers will enjoy greater job security when the ownership of their workplace resides with people born in the same country. It is taken it for granted that those who own the factories, raw materials and land, and those who sell their labour power for wages and salaries within the same country, automatically share a 'common interest,' when the opposite is actually the case.

Capitalism has divided the world into two irreconcilable but interdependent groups - the working class and the capitalist class. Despite the fact that the interests of these two classes are antagonistic, the relationship is also strangely symbiotic. The working class own no means of producing

wealth and are dependent, through wages and salaries, on those who do, while the owners of the means of production are dependent on a subordinate working class to sustain their position of power and privilege. The working class exchange labour power for money which allows them to gain limited access to the necessities of life. In this exchange the worker produces value greater than that of their own labour power. This value belongs to the capitalist.

Calls for the 'right' to work, sometimes heard in times of economic depression, are therefore no more than a demand for the 'right' to be exploited by anyone willing to offer employment. Arguments about 'fair wages' are simply abstractions that acknowledge the power of the capitalist class to dictate the condition of life over the subordinate working class. Society as presently organised cannot be operated in any other way and workers who never look beyond this truism fail to comprehend that an alternative society that does not work against their interests can be established - but that society is not capitalism.

Production in capitalist society is geared strictly to the generation of profit - extracted from the working class when goods are produced and released when they are sold on the market to those who have the money to buy. Individual companies are dependent on generating and attracting capital to reinvest in order to continue operating. Capital always chases profit, moving from less successful companies to those where profit expectation is higher, without regard to the effect on employment or human welfare. Capital does not discriminate between the relative merits of the products and makes no distinction between the production of bombs and the production of bandages as long as the risk is as low and the activity as profitable as possible.

Wage labour and capital are in constant conflict. The capitalist class is continuously seeking to reduce the workers' share of the social product to expand the accumu-

continued on page 17

Who Are the Looters?

A year after hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans we look at what was a media obsession at the time.



Far left: Jabar Gibson driving evacuees by bus to Houston. Left: Mayor Ray Nagin, who told police to stop rescuing people and crack down on looters.

What is the first priority of government in the wake of disaster? Saving lives? Looking after the survivors? Disposing of the dead and preventing epidemics?

Think again. At best these things come second. The first priority of government in the wake of disaster is exactly the same as its first priority at other times: maintaining or restoring "order" - that is, its powers of coercion. Moreover, the first purpose of "order" is to protect and enforce property rights. From this point of view, the main threat posed by disasters like Hurricane Katrina is not the threat to human life and health, to the environment, or even to the economy. It is the threat of "chaos," the threat to "order" and "civilization," but above all to property, arising from the temporary breakdown of government.

The "looter" symbolizes and dramatizes this threat, conjuring up images of Viking warriors on the rampage, barbaric violence, evil incarnate. Of course, these particular "Vikings" were all the more terrifying for being black. In the days that followed the hurricane, the media stirred up racist fears of the poor black people of New Orleans, spreading rumours (the fashionable expression is "urban myths") later shown to be exaggerated out of all proportion, if not completely unfounded. For example, in the week following Katrina the number of murders was average for the city (four) (see Ivor van Heerden and Mike Bryan, *The Storm*, pp. 124-8).

All in all, we shouldn't be too shocked or too surprised to learn that at 7 p.m. on Wednesday August 31, 2005 martial law was declared in the flooded city. Mayor Ray Nagin told police officers to *stop rescuing people* and focus solely on the job of cracking down on looters. This was just two and a half days after the hurricane made landfall and with thousands of

people still stranded in attics and on rooftops.

In one typically heroic encounter, police officers chased down a woman with a cart of supplies for her baby, handcuffed her - and then didn't know what to do with her. All the jails were flooded. By the end of the week that problem was solved. A new makeshift jail was set up at the Greyhound bus terminal, with accommodation for 750 prisoners. This was the *first* institution in the city to resume normal functioning.

True, it could have been worse. After the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 people were shot dead as looters while foraging in the wreckage of their own homes (see G. Hansen and E. Condon, *Denial of Disaster*, 1989).

Why did people loot? Or to use less loaded language, why did they take things that didn't belong to them without paying for them?

One man answered a TV interviewer who had asked him why he was looting by asking in turn: "Can you see anyone to pay?" The stores had been abandoned by

"the looters of New Orleans are keeping up an old American tradition and should receive credit as good patriots"

their operators, but people still needed the things stored there. They needed food and fresh water, dressings for their wounds, new clothes to replace those ruined by exposure to the "toxic gumbo" of the

floodwaters. Most of the so-called looting was of this kind - for the satisfaction of desperate need. In any sane society that would be a good enough reason for taking things.

Two paramedics from San Francisco who found themselves trapped in New Orleans wrote about the Walgreens store on the corner of Royal and Iberville Streets in the French quarter. The owners had locked up and fled. Milk, yogurt, and cheese could be seen through the window in the dairy display case, spoiling in the heat.

Should we expect the parents of hungry and thirsty children not to break in, even at the risk of being pursued by the police? Would they have been good parents had they failed to do all in their power to see to their children's needs? And what of storeowners who choose to let food go to waste rather than give it to needy neighbours? My first impulse is to wax lyrical about the sheer meanness of their behaviour. But probably they made no such *conscious* choice. As businesspeople they must have thought of the food and drink in their store not as *products* for assuaging hunger and thirst, but merely as *commodities* for profitable sale. If they could no longer be sold they might just as well go to waste.

There were looters who acted not just for themselves and their families but for the benefit of the local community. For instance, the young men who collected medical supplies from a Rite Aid for distribution among elderly neighbours. Or the man who distributed food from a Winn-Dixie store to the 200 or so people holed up at the Grand Palace Hotel. "He was trying to help suffering people, and the idea that he was looting never crossed his mind."

Socially responsible people of this kind are sometimes described as "comman-



Armour patrols the streets

deering" or "requisitioning" the goods they seize. That may well be how they view their own actions. In legal terms, however, only government officials, as representatives of duly constituted authority, have the right to commandeer or requisition property in an emergency. Private citizens who do so, whatever their motives, are engaging in theft and may be penalized accordingly.

Consider the feat of Jabar Gibson. This resourceful young man, purely on his own initiative, found a bus that was still in working order (the city authorities assumed that all buses had been ruined by the floodwater), took charge of it, filled it up with evacuees, and drove them to Houston. This was the *first* busload of evacuees to reach Houston after the storm (at 10 p.m. on Wednesday August 31). The police were forewarned that a "renegade bus" was on its way; if they had intercepted it Jabar might have been arrested and charged with theft. Fortunately he was in luck: he got through to his destination, to be greeted by Harris County Judge Robert Eckels. Presumably his crime has been forgiven.

Of course, not all looters were responding to real personal, family, or community needs. Some were simply taking a rare opportunity to acquire coveted though nonessential consumer goods. For others looting (and shitting in) fancy stores

was a form of social protest or "empowerment," an outlet for pent-up anger against the endlessly advertised world of affluence from which they felt excluded.

Finally, there was a phenomenon that I propose calling "entrepreneurial looting." Entrepreneurial looters gathered assets with a view to later sale. As they got stuff for free, they could sell at any price and still make a profit. For example, "urban foresters" went after valuable lumber." Other entrepreneurs sold looted liquor. The cases of large-scale organized looting by armed groups (their weapons also probably looted) that received so much publicity must, I think, have been of this character.

Brinkley reports an interesting conversation between Lieutenant Colonel Bernard McLaughlin of the Louisiana National Guard and a man selling liquor at a makeshift bar. When McLaughlin tells the bartender he is shutting him down, the man replies that he is "just being entrepreneurial." Why shouldn't he make some money? McLaughlin gets angry at this appeal to "true American" values. "This is looting. You looted that... That's a 15-year felony. That's a 3-year mandatory minimum sentence." The man submits and McLaughlin proceeds to smash his bottles one by one. And yet the preceding account makes clear that McLaughlin's real objection to such bars has nothing to do with the provenance of the alcohol. He doesn't want

"Looting is as American as cherry pie"

the locals drinking alcohol because it makes them more quarrelsome and disorderly as well as further dehydrating their bodies. Would he have allowed the bar to stay open if it was selling - or giving away - only looted fruit juice, soda, and bottled water? Legally, however, looting remains "a 15-year felony," be its social consequences good or bad. Property is sacred.

The bartender might also have tried to point out in his defence that historically all capitalist enterprise is based on looting. Early capitalism looted land and other resources from peasants (in Europe) and from indigenous peoples (throughout the Americas and other colonial territories). The looting even extended to the kidnapping and enslavement of millions of human beings, such as the ancestors of most victims of Hurricane Katrina. Marx called it the primitive accumulation of capital. Looting is as American as cherry pie; the looters of New Orleans are keeping up an old American tradition and should surely receive all due credit as good patriots. But... it depends on *whose possessions you loot*, doesn't it? ■

STEFAN

(Sources: Douglas Brinkley, *The Great Deluge* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006); Understanding Katrina website (understandingkatrina.ssrc.org), Kaufman.)



Cooking the Books (1)

Was there an alternative?

Mrs Thatcher always maintained there was no alternative to the policy her government was pursuing in the 1980s of putting promotion of profits before meeting people's needs. When challenged about cutting benefits and social services, she replied: There Is No Alternative. When confronted with protests about closing factories and coalmines, her reply was the same: TINA.

Socialists were inclined to agree. We knew that capitalism - the profit system - runs on profits and that all governments, taking on as they do the management of capitalism, sooner or later have to apply its priority of profits before people. The Thatcher government was merely doing this sooner rather than later and with undisguised glee. Not that capitalism can never offer reforms but, since the post-war boom came to an end in the early 70s, previous reforms had become too expensive and had to be cut back to ease the burden of taxation on profit-seeking business.

Proof that there is no alternative under

capitalism to putting profits first has been provided by the Blair government which took over in 1997. They have continued the same policy, even if they have been more mealy-mouthed about it, calling it "modernisation" and even "reform".

Now, in a bid to out-Blair Blair, the new Tory leader wants to kill off Tina. The *Times* (22 May) reported that "David Cameron will tell business leaders today that there is 'more to life than money' as he attempts to make a clean break with Thatcherism".

The pre-released text of his speech explained:

"Wealth is about so much more than pounds or euros or dollars can ever measure. It's time we admitted that there's more to life than money, and it's time we focused not just on GDP, but on GWB - general wellbeing. Wellbeing can't be measured by money or traded in markets. It can't be required by law or delivered by government. It's about the beauty of our surroundings, the quality of our culture, and above all the strength of our relationships."

Most people probably feel like this, but capitalism as an economic system cannot take into account "general wellbeing" precisely because this can't be quantified in money terms. Capitalism is all about making and accumulating monetary profits and,

in pursuit of this, not only ignores but actually degrades "the beauty of our surroundings, the quality of our culture, and the strength of our relationships".

Cameron, naturally, disagrees. The next Tory government, he said, will embrace "capitalism with commitment" (*Times*, 23 May), presumably to make it promote people's general wellbeing.

The trouble is that Cameron himself is a product of the degradation of "the quality of our culture". He's just an image designed and packaged by the same people who try to (mis)sell us washing powder, deodorants and private pensions, only with the aim changed to attracting votes rather than sales. To expect such a product to change capitalism's priorities is just absurd.

The next Tory government will be no different from the present Labour one. It will continue to promote the general commercialisation of life and the reduction of human values to monetary ones. People will continue to be reduced towards becoming isolated atoms competing against each other on the market place, with the consequent weakening of "our relationships".

That's the tendency under capitalism, which no government can reverse. There is no alternative. Or rather, there is, but not within the profit system.



For whom the bell tolled

July saw commemorations for the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Spanish Civil war which lasted until 1939. Usually little heard of outside historian and left circles it remains a conflict shrouded in myth, heroism and controversy.

For most of the early 20th Century Spain had been in turmoil, the monarchy fell, in 1931 - and liberals and conservatives were still struggling over the future shape of society. Trade unions - heavily influenced by anarchism (especially in Catalonia and Barcelona) were more like paramilitary forces, fighting a pistolismo war with employers and the state who were brutally trying to suppress them into brutal poverty. The worker's movement was split, however, and there was a large Socialist Party (PSE, chiefly a Labour party of the traditional type) with its trade union federation the UGT, with the anarchists in the syndicalist CNT.

Some (these days, those with long memories) use the example of Spain as an incident in which the capitalists would turn to arms and civil war to stop a rising socialist movement, but this ignores several fea-

tures of the events that lead up to the civil war.

Although often portrayed as a war to defend democracy from insurgent fascists, it is fair to say that political democracy did not command strong support from all sides of the political spectrum. Indeed, in 1934, Largo Caballero, the "Spanish Lenin", led an abortive revolt with a general strike that was crushed in Madrid, and the miners in Asturias managed to take control of their whole region before being put down - a genuine uprising. This attempt at violent revolution terrified the professional and ruling class of Spain, and set the stage for later tensions. By February 1936 Caballero and the leadership of the Spanish Socialist Party were out of prison and instead part of the newly elected popular front government which won by the slimmest of majorities.

This front consisted of liberals, Basque and Catalan separatists, the PSE and the Communist Party. Although the working class parties were the larger, the liberals actually headed the government - something which was not conducive to stable rule. The PSE itself was not united, ranging from Fabian-like reformists through to die-hard revolutionaries. So it is clear that there was not a solid considered demand for revolutionary change. The Asturias rising had frightened the horses, and the right began to plot their own uprising.

In the background to all of this, political assassinations and murders continued apace - with partisans of the right and the left at each others' throats. Churches were burned down, political offices wrecked, chaos was spreading throughout society. The sort of everyday politically motivated chaos we have seen so many times since - currently in Iraq, for example.

At the head of the rightwing were the Falangists, a genuinely radical fascist grouping determined to smash the socialists. They were joined by conservative Catholics (representing a large landowning interest), monarchists and the military. It would be the military, under General Francisco Franco, who would provide the main vehicle for the National Front's resistance.

On 18 July 1936 Franco issued a *pronunciamento*, the traditional announcement that preceded Spain's many previous military coups. Unlike them, however, this was a call for a massive social struggle, and one that both sides had been waiting for. Carnage began immediately - radio officers shot their ship's captain rather than hand them over the order. The barracks in Barcelona was surrounded and eventually vanquished after bloody struggle - a national general strike was called.

There followed a savage war - with estimates of the number who died varying from three hun-





dred thousand to a million. It was a thoroughly modern war of the people in arms - aided with zeal, heroism and determination against the organised efficiency of a professional army. Although the advantage nominally lay with the loyalist Popular Front government forces (they had the money) they were deeply divided and Franco took the bulk of the army - especially the experienced troops.

The "international community" reacted by imposing an arms embargo on both sides - the same sort of trick the Major government used to back the Serbs in their war in the former Yugoslavia. Despite this embargo, some of the great European powers saw this as a chance to flex their muscles. Mussolini's fascist government sent troops and armaments. The German Nazis sent the Condor Legion - and Spain quickly became a training yard for the new form of aerial warfare practised by the Luftwaffe. On the loyalist side aid was given by the Soviet Union through the auspices of its International Brigades - recruited by Communist Parties in various countries. Others, such as George Orwell, volunteered independently.

The international brigades to this day hold a place of honour for many in Britain, especially among the Labour Party, some of whose members revere them as defenders of democracy and anti-fascists leading the way in a war that could have stopped fascism before the great slaughter of world war two. Many died, bravely; and their defence of Madrid reads like something

from an epic poem. Their enthusiasm made them have a great impact on the war, but not enough to actually save political democracy in Spain.

What started as a local struggle quickly developed into an imperialist battleground, a proxy battle for the tussle between Germany and Russia. This aspect quickly overrode the local concerns - the communists were able to punch above their weight of support thanks to their gift of arms, and they quickly joined with government forces in suppressing the elements of social revolution and independence thrown up by anarchist groups throughout the country. Communist Party torture chambers were discovered after some of their strongholds fell.

This is the source of much of the political recriminations springing from that war. Trotskyists accuse the anarchists of failing to organise a vanguard party and seize power (which was, apparently offered them, much as Baldwin offered the reigns of government to a shocked TUC in 1926). Anarchists point to the role of the Stalinists in liquidating their advances, and point, with some justice, to their achievements. The Trotskyists accuse the Stalinists of selling out Spain in order to demonstrate to the capitalist powers that the USSR had no designs on spreading a world revolution.

In some areas revolutionary committees controlled all the major infrastructure and industry - money was replaced by varying types of voucher system (although in some places they simply instituted controlled prices and wages). Democracy ran throughout the anarchist columns, with democratically elected officers accountable to their troops. The ad hoc nature of these



American troops, International Brigade

efforts - heroic and imaginative though they were - cou-

pled with the fragmentation of Spain, the ongoing warfare and the continued existence of the market throughout the supply chain eventually meant that they were doomed to failure.

Eventually Franco triumphed, and went on to rule Spain until his death in 1975 - to that rare reward for dictators, death in office. His period of authoritarian rule, built on the back of smashing an independent workers' movement and suppressing the regionalist tendencies of the Basques and Catalans meant that a reasonably orderly transition to capitalist business as usual was possible.

The Spanish civil war has an immense ability for people to read their own interests and perspectives into it. It was a melange of heroism, imagination and derring-do mixed with calculated cruelty, brutality, murder mayhem and brute stupidity. It is difficult to blame anarchists who took up arms to defend themselves and their unions from murderous bosses; but we can perhaps look to the rejection of political democracy that preceded the civil war and gave the armed authoritarians the support they needed to break cover and launch their assault.

It is vitally important today to remember that socialists must be the standard bearers of civilisation - the defenders of the political democracy and the peace that we will need to successfully manage the transition to production for use. Rubble doesn't make a good basis for building socialism. ■

PIK SMEET



Commodity markets

"1p and 2p pieces are now worth more on the commodities market than in the high street", reported the *Times* on 12 May. Pre-1992 copper coins are 97 percent copper and, as the price of copper had reached a record high of \$8,312 a tonne, they had, theoretically, come to be worth more than their face value.

"Commodity prices yesterday", the report went on, "continued their bull run as traders bet that demand from fast-growing economies such as China would continue. Platinum, nickel, zinc and copper prices hit a new high".

Socialists, too, talk about "commodities". We say that capitalism is "the highest form of commodity production"; that workers' ability to work is today a mere "commodity", bought and sold on a market; that people's needs, and life generally, have become "commodified".

The meaning that the financial pages of the papers attach to the word is much more restricted. For them, it refers only to primary products, not just metals such as platinum, nickel, zinc and copper but also to oil and to agricultural produce such as coffee, sugar and wheat. These are indeed commodities in the Marxian sense in that they are items of wealth produced with a view to being bought and sold, but they are not the only things that are commodities.

In the Marxian sense, anything produced with a view to being sold is a commodity. Capitalism is the "highest form of commodity production" in that under it most items of wealth are produced as commodities. In addition, the human capacity to work, our mental and physical energies, take the form, as some-

thing bought and sold, of a commodity. In fact, this is what distinguishes capitalism from "simple commodity production", where this is not the case. Under capitalism anything, even if not originally produced to be sold, can, and increasingly does, take the form of a commodity, from honour, sex and influence to body parts and past works of art. There is a market for all these things. The tendency of capitalism is for everything to become "commodified".

But to return to the commodities of the financial pages, the *Times* report was unusually frank in admitting that gambling is involved in "commodity markets". The primary products on sale on these markets have two types of price: a "spot" price, which is the price on the day, and a "futures" price, which is a price at which someone agrees to buy or sell the product at some set future date.

The economics textbooks say this is to allow the users of the product to plan ahead. This is true but you don't have to be someone who actually wants copper or oil or wheat or whatever to intervene on a commodity market. When you buy something there is no physical transfer of the product but merely a change of ownership.

Gamblers can offer to buy a product in the future at a given price even though they don't want it, in effect betting that the spot price at that time will be higher. In which case they sell - transfer ownership - and walk away laughing with a bigger bank balance, while the product goes to someone who will use it to produce something.

It's nice to know that while millions are suffering from malnutrition there are others gambling on the future price of wheat. What a way to organise the production and distribution of the things humans needs to live and enjoy life.

The Battle of the Somme

The recent 90th anniversary of the human tragedy of the Somme saw the politicians, the churches and the organisations charged with remembrance giving history a makeover.



The Allied warlords planned a massive assault set for mid-summer 1916. The offensive was to be carried through by the combined Allied armies and was intended to break through the German lines on the Western, Eastern and Italian fronts imposing a defeat of such magnitude on Germany as to bring a speedy end to the First World War.

Doubtless it all worked out well for the generals and marshals as they threw clay representatives of thousands of human beings into homicidal battle against one another on the sands table; But battles are not won on sands tables and in the early spring of 1916 the Germans spoiled the plot by opening up a massive assault against the French city of Verdun which absorbed French divisions planned into the attack on the Western Front at the Somme.

In the week before the 1st of July Allied artillery carried out a ceaseless bombardment of German positions on a five-mile stretch of the front. In all they fired 1.6 million shells but many of the British shells failed to explode and the German fortifications not only proved largely resistant to the shelling but also provided subterranean tunnelling where soldiers could take refuge from the bombardment.

Such was the confidence of the British Command that an enervated German line would crumble before the ferocity of a massed attack that they ordered their 11 divisions to *walk* steadily across No-Man's-Land towards the German fortifications. At 7.30 hours on July 1st the men arose out of their entrenchments in response to the blowing of whistles and proceeded to walk towards their objectives.

Immediately they were confronted with a deadly fusillade from German machine-guns. Like lemmings they offered their bodies like blades of grass before a scythe; wave after wave of them, the cared prodigy of wives and mothers learning the falsehood of patriotism or paying the price for volunteering away from poverty or the

dull, hum-drum meanness of wage slavery. 60,000 of them fell that day, 20,000 dead, the rest flawed statistics.

The chaplains were busy intoning their prayers to a remorseless god and the generals, too, were brutal and remorseless for it didn't stop; it continued the next day and for four more months. In October the torrential rains came changing the blood-soaked ground into a quagmire where putrefying

“There were no generals killed or wounded and the Allied forces had advanced 5 miles ”

human flesh mingled with the mud and obstructed men as they were striven to further slaughter. When this single phase of the hellish conflict was exhausted in mid-November those designated as 'British' were 420,000 fewer while the French lost 195,000 men and the Germans over 600,000. There were no generals killed or wounded and the Allied forces had advanced 5 miles over wasted, barren land.

The Somme, Passendale, Salonika, Suvla Bay, names of strange places that became prominent in the lexicon of war and its brutalities. 'Men led by donkeys' was the popular alibi for the monstrous slaughter and the ineptitude of warlords like the British Somme commander, Earl Haig became the focus of bitter criticism and sick jokes. There was no poetry now in the killing; the avalanche of stereotyped telegrams expressing official regret at the death of a husband or son began to speak louder than the xenophobic vapourings of politicians and the media and officialdom

may well have been haunted by the thought that workers turned soldiers might catch on to the duality of their exploitation and the brutally obvious fact that a social system that required periodic bloodletting was fatally flawed.

Time has accounted for those who survived the battle; those who ploughed through the detritus of decaying human flesh and wept for dead comrades.

If you were a tourist from Mars attending the Somme commemoration the vital question you might want to ask is why were millions of men, men of no property and no financial interests, men who had never met those they were now told were their enemies and with whom they did not share a language that would allow them to curse at one another, *why were they killing? Why were they dying?*

The answer is that they were fighting over markets and the political and economic appurtenances of trade; that war was, and is, simply a logical extension of a brutally competitive system of social organisation predicted on profit and ongoing expansion; a system that dominated their lives, took away their human dignity and reduced them to the status of wage slaves and cannon fodder.

So the question must be avoided at all costs; capitalism's obsequious apologists, its politicians, its beholden clergy and media hacks will change the script: Tell the fools how brave they were and how proud they should be; that'll keep them happy to the next time.

"Give a benediction, bless them with a prayer,

And tell them how the son of God was longing to be there!"

In the circumstances of the conflict bravery is a empty virtue; an abuse of language that must surely add insult to injury. ■

RICHARD MONTAGUE



Thirty-five billion

I've been toying with the figure \$35 billion which I heard the other day - toying with it because I, like most folk I've spoken to about it since, couldn't grasp the sheer enormity of it. What did it actually represent? So I decided to do my own in-home research using the New Internationalist World Guide latest edition's figures (UN statistics).

This is what I came up with:

\$35,000,000,000 is the equivalent of (GNI is gross national income):

- 1) 1 year's GNI of \$35,000 for 1,000,000 people in USA
- 2) 1 year's GNI of \$1,000 for 35,000,000 people in the Philippines
- 3) 1 year's GNI of \$480 for 70,000,000 people in India
- 4a) 1 year's GNI of \$240 for 140,000,000 people in Mali or
- 4b) 10 year's GNI for total population of 14 million in Mali
- 5a) 1 year's GNI of \$100 for 350,000,000 people in Ethiopia or
- 5b) 5 year's GNI for total population of 74 million in Ethiopia.

Now, if just one person owned all that wealth they'd have to put it somewhere safe, in some kind of bank or shares or whatever where it would be safe and accumulate, e.g. a 1 percent return over 1 year would produce \$350,000,000 in interest; a 5 percent return \$1,750,000,000; 10 percent \$3,500,000,000 and so on - assume compound interest kicking in and you'll have to do your own figures or find an expert; however, you get the picture.

Of course when you've managed to accrue enough after a few years to be able to give away the lion's share without noticing any difference at all in your own life style people will applaud you and say what a wonderful, altruistic person you are.

What would you choose to do with your fortune? Beat malaria? Wipe out the debt of several Highly Impoverished Nations? Bring clean water to some of the millions without? Fund schools or hospitals in perpetuity from your foundation's coffers? The possibilities are endless.

But, surely, one person wouldn't actually have so much money! How would one person acquire enough in the first place to be able to put money to work to accrue more money? Simple, just use other people, lots and lots of people, to do the work for less than it's worth to produce the goods on your behalf and pocket the difference.

The less you manage to pay your workers and the more you're able to sell your goods for to other workers, the better the profit you'll make, enabling you to be the one to choose how to improve life on the planet

for the unfortunate masses.

How can it be, however intelligent, hardworking, honest and/or altruistic, that ONE person's 'gift' can be equal to the income of all the people of Ethiopia, men, women and children, for 5 years?

How can it be that one person should be able to choose how to affect (or not to affect) such a multitude of people, albeit in a positive way?

How can it be that so many people have so little choice in their own lives?

It's the system, my friends, the system that puts profit above all else - how else could it work?

The system that uses and abuses people all around the world, the system that can't work with full employment, universal healthcare and satisfied bellies, but must rely on chasing profit around the globe whatever the consequences for the planet and its inhabitants.

Imagine 1,000,000 US citizens giving up their whole year's income.

Imagine the entire population of Mali having no income at all for 10 years.

Imagine one man having that much spare cash. I don't doubt that you know which particular man I'm writing about - the second richest man in the world, Warren Buffet, who's decided to donate not \$35b but \$37b to the charitable foundation of the richest man (Bill Gates).

But what's \$2,000,000,000? Well, 3 years GNI for the Maldives . . .

Am I knocking Bill Gates, Warren Buffet et al? No, I'm knocking the system which allows, nay encourages, a small minority to exploit the vast majority in an unequal relationship. The capitalist system cannot work with equal relationships. There have to be (a few) winners and (many) losers.

Life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, the right to clean water, enough food, access to health care, a comfortable home, to raise one's children in a cooperative rather than a competitive society in a well-husbanded world environment in the knowledge that there is a sufficiency of all our basic needs and no good reason for anyone to go without. This is the only fair system.

If you're content with the status quo then carry on as before. However, if you've taken the time to read this far the chances are you're not content. If you're sick and tired of hearing the same old political fixes on offer and are looking for real answers then take a few more minutes to look at the only alternative. It could be the best thing you'll do this year. ■

JANET SURMAN

Calling Home

One aspect of globalisation is outsourcing or offshoring: moving jobs from a country where they've traditionally been performed to another, usually on the grounds of lower wages and therefore higher profits. This has already happened with many manufacturing jobs: work is now carried out in China and India rather than in Britain or elsewhere in Western Europe.

But factories aren't the only workplaces to be outsourced, for it also applies to one of the 'boom' occupations of recent years, namely workers in the call centres which are often now the only way to contact your bank, insurers or credit card company. A huge office-cum-warehouse where employees essentially just answer the phone all day doesn't need to be in the same country as the caller or the company's head office. After all, if you live in Dover it probably doesn't matter if your call is answered by someone in Delhi rather than Darlington - indeed you may well not know where the person at the other end of the phone line is. Hence many call centres operate in India, which has a ready and keen supply of educated English-speakers. Workers there are given special classes in British TV, especially soap operas, so they can engage in chit-chat with callers, who often want to do a bit more than just talk about their bank account. Savings for the employers could be as much as 50 percent over a similar operation in Britain.

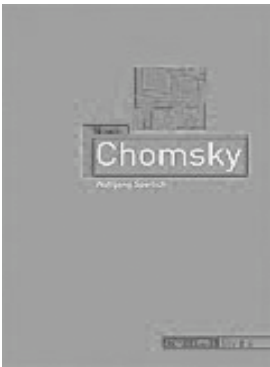
But now it seems that all is not so rosy in the garden of the outsourced call centre (*Guardian*, 30 June). For one thing, workers in India have turned out to be not so docile or grateful for the work after all, as absenteeism and staff turnover approach levels found in the UK. This is what happens with so many of the jobs resulting from globalisation: they're boring, there's no career structure, and workers are subject to a lot of petty controls such as the time taken for breaks. And for another, there have been complaints about poor service, and some companies make a point of advertising the fact that their own call centres are still in Britain. There's no doubt some prejudice operating here, against non-native speakers of English, but if companies lose customers because of their perceptions about call centres then they will sit up and take notice.

The sting in the tail of the *Guardian* article is the information that an Indian outsourcing company is intending to set up a large new call centre in Belfast, attracted by the cheap property prices there. Capitalism truly is a global system, and those who own the means of production will go to any lengths to boost their profits. ■

PB

Chomsky

Wolfgang Sperlich: *Noam Chomsky*. Reaktion £10.95.



This is a volume in the Critical Lives series, so it opens with a brief biographical sketch of Chomsky, noting that he was influenced by writers such as Anton Pannekoek and Paul Mattick. It's good to learn that by his early teens Chomsky was not just opposed to Stalinism but was also "a pretty committed anti-Leninist". Then comes a chapter on his contributions to linguistics and philosophy, though to be honest you'd need to have some prior idea of his views here to make much sense of Sperlich's presentation.

The main chapter is entitled 'Political Activist', and it presents Chomsky's writings on various political issues, concentrating on his exposures of US foreign policy. This is a decent guide to Chomsky's attacks on the US government, military and establishment, from Vietnam to Nicaragua, the Middle East to the aftermath of 9/11. Unfortunately there's little attempt at elaborating Chomsky's own views on how society should be organised, other than labelling him variously as an anarcho-syndicalist and a libertarian socialist. He's quoted at on point as saying, "capitalist relations of production, wage labor, competitiveness, the ideology of 'possessive individualism' - all must be regarded as fundamentally antihuman." Also that a consistent anarchist must oppose wage slavery and private ownership of the means of production.

Chomsky has often expressed his support for 'left wing' governments in the developing world. With regard to the president of Brazil, Sperlich writes, "I ask Chomsky if Lula da Silva shouldn't have abolished the state of Brazil by now and introduced council communism or anarcho-syndicalist freedom. Chomsky answers that it's easy for us to say such things because we do not have to live with the consequences - Lula da Silva has to." Perhaps Chomsky should have said that it was a bloody stupid question, based on the assumption that a political leader can introduce a new social system.

The last chapter summarises Chomsky's work on the mass media as a tool for suppressing the truth and presenting a pro-capitalist view of the world, for (in the title of one of Chomsky's books) 'Manufacturing Consent'.

So this is a useful if unexciting guide to Chomsky's ideas. And until I read Sperlich I didn't know there is a radio station called Radio Chomsky, even if it is in New Zealand (see <http://www.radiochomsky.com/>).

PB

"Marxists"

Phil Rees: *Dining with Terrorists*. Pan, £7.99.

When I listen to BBC correspondents talking about 'Marxists', which they frequently find in remote jungles and other desolate places on the planet, I am tempted to think of Cyril.

Cyril and I were young together; he was academically bright, knowledgeable and had even what is now called 'streetcred', virtues which earned him considerable grudging respect among us, his peers. His virtues became past tense, however. One summer's evening when four of us, coincidentally apprentices in Irish 'terrorism', were sitting around an open fire where we were camping outside the coastal village of Cushendall in County Antrim. Probably the subject led to it, I don't remember exactly, but Cyril announced with profound authority that he not only believed in fairies but that he had actually seen and heard fairies! It cost him his credibility; all his intellectual capability was eclipsed by that single absurdity.

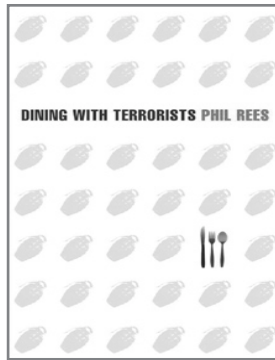
The author of *Dining with Terrorists*, Phil Rees, was, and maybe still is, a BBC journalist who has worked on *Correspondent* and *Newsnight* and who has spent gruelling spells in many of the world's trouble spots. He has dined with people who have killed their political enemies or who have - rather like Bush and Blair - set in train such killings and who for so doing or allegedly doing have become known to us through the media as 'terrorists'.

From his experiences he gives us graphic word pictures of fearsome characters and to his credit he tries to tell their story within the context of what we have been told about them by the western media. Indeed that is the *raison d'être* of Rees's work. It is his effort to define in 'moral' terms the meaning of the word 'terrorist' in light of the awesome legal violence used by and in the control of the modern state, and the brutal reaction that violence frequently spawns. It is a theme often pursued in the *Socialist Standard* and one expressed in the aphorism 'One man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist'.

Given such honesty of purpose it is regrettable that the author demeans his work by the undefined abuse of the term 'Marxist': throughout the entire book he uses the word as though it was an essential pre-fix to the words 'terrorist' and 'terrorism' that so confuses him.

In the fashion of the BBC and its journalists, he makes no attempt whatsoever to outline what he perceives to be Marxist or Marxism. Doubtless if he knew, he would realise just how ridiculous it is to suggest that, for example, FARC nationalists in Columbia are killing in order to establish a wageless, moneyless society of common ownership and production for use.

Away from the often-repeated non-



sense about Marx and terrorism the book is both interesting and informative but the informed reader will find Rees's belief in fairies more than a little distracting.

RM

Pensions myth

Phil Mullan: *The Imaginary Time Bomb. Why An Ageing Population is not a Social Problem*. IB Taurus.

There are too many old people. They are becoming an unsupportable burden on the pensions and health systems. If nothing is done about it there will be a generation war between pensioners and the decreasing proportion of those of working age.

So runs the argument consistently put over by the media. But, according to Mullan, it's a myth based on faulty statistics, disguising a hidden agenda by people who want to cut pension and welfare benefits for other reasons and/or want to make money by selling private pensions.

He points out that while the proportion of over-64s in the population is indeed rising this is mainly a reflection of a reduced birth rate in the past, which has meant a fall in those now in the 16-64 age range. This has happened before in the last century without the dire consequences now being predicted. Most estimates, he says, don't take into account the reduced expenditure on the under 16s that a fallen birth rate means nor the fact that a significant proportion of the 16-64s are also not working, not just the disabled and the recorded unemployed but also many who are on "incapacity" benefit as early retirees whom capitalism denies a job. Nor does it take into account the fact that over time the productivity of those at work rises nor that the health of the over-64s is improving.

So, for Mullan, the "pensions time bomb" is an imaginary threat, but not just a panic cynically stirred up by vested interests. It is also a reflection of what he calls the current "age of anxiety" where:

"The feeling of uncertainty and insecurity influences discussion and debate in all sphere's of life. Politicians have lost popular authority and have tended to limit their objectives. The main idea coming out of political think tanks on both sides of the Atlantic seems to be that there are no more 'big ideas'. Most Western governments have adopted a narrower agenda of managing what exists rather than seeking to intervene in society in pursuance of more ambitious aims. . . Interacting with the élite's loss of nerve, the erosion of previous collectivities is a major source for this popular mood. The demise during the 1980s of trade unions and of less formal mechanisms of support, solidarity and community have left people more on their own than ever to face the problems of everyday life. The social fragmentation and individuation that has made life seem more secure".

This pessimism, bred (we would add) by the inability of capitalism to meet needs and by the failure of reformism last century, is the fertile ground on which the vested interests concerned have been able to sow this particular panic.

ALB

"Red Elvis"

Dean Reed: Death of a Comrade. Radio 2, 11 July. Presented by Mark Lamarr.

For a time in the 1970s, Dean Reed was probably the best-known American in South America and Eastern Europe. Though, as he sang, "Nobody knows me back in my home town." Born in Denver in 1938, Reed was a rock singer who never quite made the big time in the US. Understandably enough, he felt that nobody who worked in Hollywood could keep their integrity.

When one of his records became a hit in Chile, he travelled there to perform and was struck by the obvious inequalities in power and wealth. He later settled in Argentina, but after some unwelcome attention from the dictatorship he moved to Europe. His left-wing views attracted the attention of cultural bosses in Russia, and he was invited there. He became a great success with young people in eastern Europe, who were keenly interested in Western popular music.

In 1973 Reed decided to move to East Germany permanently. The secret police or Stasi were initially suspicious of him and spied on him, but they later tried unsuccessfully to recruit him as an agent. By the 1980s, however, he was no longer a star in Eastern Europe, as younger musicians from the West were touring there. He considered returning to the US, but remarks on radio and TV chat shows (e.g. comparing Reagan to Stalin and defending the Berlin Wall) led to him receiving hate mail. In June 1986 he was found dead in a lake near his home in East Berlin - officially an accident but probably suicide.

Mark Lamarr's programme contained interviews with people who knew Reed and excerpts from his (unexceptional) music. It also made the point that he failed to see how ordinary East Germans felt about the regime that governed them and how they viewed him as an establishment figure. So the rebel became another apologist for the Bolshevik dictatorship, one who certainly would have had no place in a unified Germany.

PB

letters continued

people in need of each other and with the same basic needs. There is far more that unites us than can ever divide us along cultural, nationalistic or religious lines. Together we can create a civilization worth living in, but before that happens we need the conscious cooperation of ordinary people across the world, united in one common cause-to create a world in which each person has free access to the benefits of civilization, a world without frontiers or borders, social classes or leaders and a world in which production is at last freed from the shackles of artificial constraints of profit and used for the good of humanity.

War is not about our interests, but those of the bosses who rob us so that they can be rich and powerful. War is about the competition between capitalists. If we are to die it will be for them. Think about that as the masters of war ask for your support in the prevailing wars.

Why should we die defending what is not ours and which we will never benefit from?

On the contrary our object is to obtain what is not now the possession of our class-the earth and its natural and industrial resources. The class war between the parasites who possess and the workers who produce-is the real struggle that need concern us. And to win that war we need not initiate the violence which is characteristic of capitalism's wars. The war we should advocate is that which has to be waged on the battle of ideas-for the hearts and minds of the world's people. And once we unite there will be no force that will stop us taking the earth into our common possession.

There is nothing natural about war. Are we born with a desire to kill people who speak a different language or who have a different skin colour? No! In fact peaceful cooperation is more fitting for human beings who are potentially rational human beings. Once we live in a world of common ownership and democratic control of resources, there will simply be no reason to kill one another. No empires to build or markets to expand or profits to increase.

WEIJAGYE JUSTUS, Kabale, Uganda

Foreign takeovers... continued

lation of capital and has become an uncontrollable independent power without regard for human need, seeking out opportunities to grow anywhere and everywhere across the world. Globalisation is merely the newest name for a process that has been ongoing since capitalism was first established.

Capitalism is an intensely predatory economic system. In the competitive struggle for survival many companies may be driven from business by competitors, while others, attracted by rising profits or a desire to suppress competition will be taken over or merged with rivals. Employment is dependent upon generating profit, which means that the real function of the world's working class is not to make products or provide services but to generate and then increase these profits. Working people in every country are trapped in an economic system where they must sell - and thereby relinquish control over - their physical or mental energies simply to earn money to buy the things that enable them to resume the same routine, week on week to the end of their working lives. This vicious circle will continue until capital is abolished and capitalism brought to an end.

The conclusion reached in the Harris poll is indicative of worker confusion - a misguided belief that it is somehow less painful to be exploited by the portion of the owning class based within these boundaries than by that based elsewhere. The cause of poverty and insecurity is not the threat of 'foreign' companies but the economic system that sustains the international class monopoly over wealth creation and draws strength by exploiting working people in every country. As long as capitalism is allowed to continue it makes little actual difference to the working class who owns their place of employment - they will remain expendable wage or salary earners.

For as long as workers are deceived into viewing the world from a 'national' perspective, they will fail to understand their condition in capitalism. The working class is deluded by nationalism. Such beliefs actively encourage people to co-operate with their 'national' exploiters operating within boundaries determined purely by historical accident. Nationalism conceals the real nature of capitalism, turns worker against worker and serves to impede working-class solidarity. The world's working class have no reason to be antagonistic to other workers but must unite against their common class enemy: the world's capitalist class. ■

STEVE TROTT

Canned Laughter

Some people, including some socialists, used to get quite irritated about the way that recorded laughter was inserted into, first radio, then television, shows that went under the generic heading of comedy. But we have slowly got used to this feature of modern life in capitalist society. It is almost universal now. It is applied to quality comedy and poor comedy; those with real audiences and those with no possibility of an audience at all in the location of the action. Like antidepressant drugs, canned laughter is prescribed for nearly everybody. Because, let's face it, much of the time, if you didn't laugh, you'd cry.

Many aspects of living in this increasingly dysfunctional world society are moving in the same direction. In Japan, as well as North America and Europe shopping has become the diversionary avenue of seeking feel-good factors. Clothes, to make us feel good about

our appearance; various types of car, to make us comfortable about our status among our neighbours; health foods, to make us feel healthy; exotic foods to make us feel opulent; gyms, to make us feel confident or even superior about our physical fitness and sexual attractiveness. Houses, gardens, kitchens, etc., etc. Our electronic gadgetry, from mobile phones and digital cameras to MP3 recorders and players, offer us more power to do things we hadn't even thought of and probably will never try.

The planet is being pillaged, plundered and polluted to make commodities for us to buy, partly because we need them and capital must have the flow of profit, but increasingly in the effort to obliterate our basic hunger for freedom, the one thing we cannot have. Like canned laughter, the temporary lift we get from commodity gratification is artificial, false. It hides a bad joke. ■

R.C.

WSM FORUM

- Want to talk about what you've just read?
- Can't make it to a meeting?
- Discuss the questions of the day with Party members and non-members online.

Join the forum via
www.worldsocialism.org

Drugs and the Death Penalty



While the controversy about the abolition of hanging has been causing such a furore in this country, a significant change in the American law recently has passed by almost without comment. This is the passing by Congress of the Bill aimed at the drug traffic in the United States, which includes in its provisions increased penalties for trafficking in drugs and, in particular, the death penalty for those found guilty of selling heroin to young people under 18. The background of the Bill, the drug traffic, was recently reported on by a US correspondent of the Economist (14th July, 1956). The picture is horrifying.

According to the Economist's correspondent the United States is said to have more drug addicts that all the other Western nations combined, and the authorities are engaged in a constant battle against the traffic. The main impetus to it is given by the needs of 60,000 addicts who are prepared to spend anything from \$10 to \$100 a day to satisfy their craving. To get this money, many of them resort to crime, and it has been said that about half of the crimes committed in large cities and about a quarter of crimes in the US are the result of this drive to get drugs.

The police seem to be able to do little more than hold their own. Smuggling is fairly easy, and rife. The product is small and expensive, and profits are huge - nine ounces of uncut heroin can earn \$50,000 when diluted for retail sale. New pedlars soon step in to take the places of those arrested and put in gaol.

Apart from the sale of such vicious drugs as heroin, there is a large business done in other less dangerous drugs, much of it barely legal. In the words of the Economist :-

"But the narcotics problem extends beyond the underworld; it reaches on to the counters of unscrupulous chemists. Housewives eager to lose weight take amphetamines and do not realise that they have become addicts until it is too late. Officials are also worried about the widespread use of barbiturates (sleeping pills). In theory these are obtainable only with a physician's prescription; in fact many chemists will sell them and users do not realise that addiction leads to grave dangers to mental health".

Altogether a terrible story. And made even more dreadful by the extension of the death penalty to try to deal with it.

(Article by S. H., *Socialist Standard*, August 1956).

Central London

Saturday 12 August, 1.30pm to 5.00pm

1.30 Welcome. Tea. Coffee. Biscuits.
2.00 Debate: **"WHERE DOES THE REAL POWER LIE IN CAPITALISM?"**

Speakers: Bill Martin and Gwyn Thomas.

Room 7. Friends Meeting House (side entrance), 173 Euston Road, London NW1 (opposite Euston mainline station). Nearest tubes: Euston, Euston Square

East Anglia

Saturday 23 September, 12 noon to 4pm

12 noon: Informal chat.

1pm: Meal.

2pm to 4pm: Discussion.

The Conservatory, back room of Rosary Tavern, Rosary Rd, Norwich.

South London

Saturday 26th August, 2.30pm

PEACE IN PALESTINE?

Speaker: Gwynn Thomas.

52, Clapham High Street, London SW4 (nearest tube: Clapham North)



Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the

consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class

will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the

working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

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



Be kind to a hoodie

"The political parties concluded that there were more votes to be won through a repressive, rather than permissive, policy about crime and punishment"

Although David Cameron, in his speech on youth offending, did not actually advise us to get out and hug as many hoodies as we could find, he should have suspected that his speech about the need to "...understand what's gone wrong in these children's lives" would be quickly summarised by the media in those sensationalist terms. Perhaps he thought he was being original (he wasn't) or courageous (gambling would be more accurate) or progressive (in fact it's all be thought of and said before). By the time of his speech hoods and hoodies had become, in New Labour speak and other such trendy verbiage, an issue. For example last May the Bluewater shopping centre in Kent banned anyone wearing a hood, along with those who swore or behaved in similarly challenging ways. But there were apparent problems in this as there has yet to be a satisfactory definition of a hoodie - does the term include the enthusiasts who gather on railway platforms to make a note of train numbers? When does an anorak become a hood, with all that implies in terms of a threat to mug old ladies who have just collected their pension from the post office? If a hood is made of the finest cashmere wool and sold in a trendy Notting Hill boutique is it still an aid to an offender trying to hide their identity? And what would the genuine hoodie think about having a fleshy Old Etonian approach him in the street, when he was out looking for an opportunity to do a bit of swift robbery, and start to hug him? Wouldn't that be enough to put anyone off a life of crime forever?

Hoodies for Sale

Bluewater said they were delighted at the effect of their measure, which they claimed was responsible for a marked increase in their customers - although how many of these were reporters and assorted media hacks is not known. Hood manufacturers made no comment; the company *Bon prix* continued to advertise its wares with pictures of pretty girls and muscular, handsome young men and slogans like "Ladies, your favourite hoodies at great prices..." Tony Blair was delighted - with his eye on the readership of the *Daily Mail* he recruited Bluewater's experience as justification for his government's introduction of Anti Social Behaviour Orders. Amid the panic a few voices were raised in question - like Harold Williamson, a policy researcher at Cardiff University, who thought "We need more politicians who are courageous, who stand up and say 'Look, this is a complex issue and we need to think about it seriously'". And there was David Cameron, adopting the role of the courageous politician who had something to gain by taking a markedly different, possibly unpopular, line :

"The hoodie is a response to a problem, not a problem in itself...But hoodies are more defensive than offensive. They're a way to stay invisible in the street. In a dangerous environment the best thing to do is keep your head down, blend in, don't stand out."

And then, crucially:

"...it's about family breakdown. It's about drugs, it's about alcohol abuse, often it's young people who are brought up in care when they should be in loving homes."

Children Acts

This did not go down well with Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells (and, as we shall see, of Bromley and Chislehurst), who would have preferred the traditionally tougher attitude Cameron had expressed only weeks before, when he assured the Centre for Policy Studies that "We support tougher sentences" and "...improving the effectiveness of the courts, and the CPS, and making sure that our prisons really work". Furious Tory bloggers

declared that they would never vote for the party while he was leader. Labour spin doctors, grateful for this opportunity to label the Tories as soft on crime, trotted out slogans about Hoodie hugging. Nobody seemed to notice that Cameron was a bit out of



Go on, give him a hug - you know you want to

date, in that he was advocating something which once almost had the status of accepted wisdom and was an article of faith among Labour Party members. The Children and Young Persons Act of 1969 was something of a zenith in the post war reformist legislation about crime. It was intended to deal with youngsters who had committed offences through local authority "care" rather than the courts. Decisions about whether a young offender stayed at home or went into residential care would be taken by Social Workers instead of magistrates (which did not please many a magistrate). The Act was driven by a mass of enquiry such as the Longford Committee which was set up in 1964 by the Labour government and which concluded that many of the offences by youngsters could be accounted for by their social conditions and that, therefore, the remedy lay in an examination of those conditions. In 1968 the Home Office stated that

"It has become increasingly clear that social control of harmful behaviour by the young, and social measures to help and protect the young, are not distinct and separate processes. The aims of protecting society from juvenile delinquency, and of helping children in trouble to grow up into mature and law-abiding persons, are complementary and not contradictory."

Futility

That was a long time ago, before the political parties concluded that there were more votes to be won through a repressive, rather than permissive, policy about crime and punishment. Michael Howard was among the more adept at this, rousing Tory conferences with flaming speeches on the theme that prison worked, advising criminals that "if you can't do the time then don't do the crime". Then there was John Major whingeing that what was needed was to "condemn a little more and understand a little less". And now there is Tony Blair and "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" which, as time passes and the criminal statistics do not support Blair's optimism, has come to mean simply being tough on crime. It will be interesting to see how long Cameron is able to persist with the policy of "understanding" and "loving"; he could not have been encouraged by the result of the by-election in Bromley and Chislehurst which, the first test of his popularity since he won the Tory leadership, saw the 13,342 majority of the staunchly right wing Eric Forth slashed to just 633.

Cameron is being accused now by his own membership of changing the Tory party so that it is almost indistinguishable from the Labour Party. Indeed, in the matter of the hoodies he has said more than Blair at his most ambitious would have dared to. Perhaps, like Blair and his drive to erect New Labour, Cameron calculates that his best chance of winning power is to make the two parties so similar that it is not just impossible but also pointless to search for enough difference between them to be worth a vote either way. But reality is clear. The politics of capitalism is the process of choosing between two or more parties which to all intents and purposes are identical. To make that choice is crass futility, while capitalism's problems, like violent crime, remain impervious to all efforts to legislate them out of existence. Instead, why not go out and hug a hoodie? ■

IVAN

Voice from the Back



The Price Of Oil

Away back in September 2003 two workers were suffocated to death in a huge gas leak on Shell's Brent Bravo oil platform in the North Sea. "Bill Campbell, a former senior manager with the oil giants, says vital maintenance work was ignored and lies told to allow platforms to carry on producing oil at all times" (Daily Record, 14 June). The company were fined £900,000 for safety breaches, an amount that is completely derisory when compared with their billions in profits every year. Bill Campbell, who worked in the North Sea for 25 years, went on BBC Scotland TV to denounce the company, but they did not send a spokesperson to deny the charges. They were probably too busy counting their profits to consider the deaths of two expendable workers.

Lazy Workers?

"Avoiding work is a full-time job and seems to be getting harder, at least in America where Workaholics Anonymous now has self-help branches in 35 cities. New figures suggest that employees are working three hours a week more than their parents did, the equivalent to nearly four extra weeks a year" (Times, 21 June). Socialists used to be told that socialism was impractical because the working class were too lazy. That argument certainly doesn't apply here.

A Tale Of Three Virgins

Three sisters in Inverness featured in a bizarre insurance policy. They insured themselves against having a virgin birth. The insurance company only cancelled the policy because of religious pressure. "The Catholic Church was not happy about what we have been doing" (The Herald, 23 June). What was their objection we wonder? They don't believe in virgin births? They could not accept the

notion that the next Jesus might be a Jock? A second coming could lead to mass unemployment in the Vatican?



Science And Profits

Sir Ian Chalmers writing in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine states that the scientific record of clinical trials is being distorted by drug companies in order to protect sales. "Patients' lives are being put at risk because drug companies cannot be trusted to publish unbiased clinical research, according to a leading scientist" (Times, 29 June). We are dealing with capitalism, we are dealing with a multi-billion dollar industry, why shouldn't we have distortion? After all that is how capitalism operates.

Not Newsworthy?

Every evening editors of The Sun, The Daily Mirror and The Daily Mail have to make a decision about what to splash on their front pages the next day. Shall it be Pop Star Sniffs Cocaine, Soap Star Visits Brothel or maybe Politician's Gay Secret? The senior policy officer for Water Aid, Henry Northover is hardly likely to make the tabloid's headlines with the following. "Imagine 20 Jumbo jets filled with children - that's the number who die every day

owing to lack of clean water and sanitation" (Observer, 2 July). We are trying to imagine 20 Jumbo jets full of children crashing every day, and frankly it makes us ill, but of course it is not newsworthy in this mad society.

For The Good Times

The end of the World Cup has left many social observers scratching their heads in disbelief. No violence, no hooliganism and no mindless madness? Can this be the working class that the Daily Mail are always warning us about? Tens of thousands of working men and women from all over the world, enjoying each others' company, laughing, joking, dancing and who knows what else. It would almost make you believe that world socialism is possible, unless you read the Daily Mail of course.

And The Bad Times

Because of the proliferation of TV channels advertisers are concerned about their "lack of penetration" into profit-making areas. Even worse is the advent of VCR recorders, where people watch shows and delete the ads. The answers for these hucksters is to sponsor sports events. Unlike soaps, that workers can look at later, sports events are watched while they occur. This explains why the TV rights for NFL (American football) is \$3.7 billion, the World Cup \$1.1 billion and why you had to watch those silly Budwieser ads. Worse is to follow. "Images like a giant Coca-Cola bottle emerging from the centre circle, can be projected onto the pitch" (Observer, 9 July). Perhaps they could arrange a penalty shoot out between Pepsi and Coca Cola? Capitalism distorts everything, even our leisure time...



Free Lunch

by Rigg



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