

World Socialist

Fall, 2020
Vol. 1, No. 1
FREE

BE REALISTIC: DEMAND THE IMPOSSIBLE.



Contents

Editorial 3

- 4 The US-China confrontation**
- 6 Markets are trash**
- 8 Socialism, Communism, Association—A rose by another name**
- 10 The revolution of 7,200 BCE**
- 12 Against police violence and racism**
- 14 A Cure for COVID-19: A Profit-Making-Strategy**
- 18 After Shipwreck**
- 20 Bombs Over Wall St**
- 22 US elections: The lesser-evil fallacy**
- 24 US elections: capitalism or capitalism?**
- 26 Rethinking the politics of the 'lesser evil'**



How I Became a Socialist 28

Reviews 30

Funnies 34

Flashback 36

References 38

Introduction



The *World Socialist* is the official quarterly publication of the World Socialist Party of the United States, featuring regular contributions from other parties in the World Socialist Movement.

Founded in 1916 — 12 years after our first sister party, the Socialist Party of Great Britain — the WSPUS still stands for the original conception of socialism and firmly against its reformist and state capitalist perversions. We understand that socialism is nothing less than a moneyless, commodityless, wageless, classless, leaderless, stateless, global society. All natural resources would be owned in common, with production being directly for use and products being distributed according to need. It can only be established democratically by an absolute majority of citizens who understand and want its establishment.

We hope this journal will illuminate many of our current problems, their causes, and — more importantly — their solutions.

Editorial

As the name indicates, the World Socialist Movement (WSM) is an international movement for world socialism. What does that mean? And why is it necessary to set such a far-reaching – many would say unrealistic – goal?

A glaring discrepancy marks the situation in which we, the human species, find ourselves – the discrepancy between an advanced and rapidly advancing science and technology and a much more primitive form of social organization. That is an extremely dangerous combination both for us and for the biosphere that we share with other species.

Science and technology are advancing at an astonishing pace. Astronomers have detected and studied 4,000 planets orbiting other stars. Plans are afoot to extract minerals from passing asteroids. Computers now beat grandmasters at chess. Not only physical labor but also many intellectual tasks are being automated. Genetic engineers can bring extinct species back to life and ‘edit’ the human genome to extend the human lifespan and eliminate hereditary diseases. It is not long since all this was confined to the realm of science fiction.

The further science and technology advance, the more outdated becomes the social system that shapes their use and abuse. Progress toward a more enlightened and united world, always painfully slow, now seems to be going into reverse. Workers are either forced to work longer and more inten-

sively or thrown on the scrap heap. Basic healthcare remains inaccessible to millions of people. Scientific advances are used to create ever more horrifying weapons of war. The planet lurches into the maw of climatic and environmental catastrophe.

Why? We argue that the main reason is the fact that the massive productive powers generated by scientific knowledge and technical ingenuity remain in the hands of a tiny minority (‘the 1%’) who exploit them for their own profit – a system that we call capitalism.

We believe that it is high time for humanity to move on from capitalism to a higher form of society in which these powers can be used responsibly for the long-term benefit of the entire community. The transition to this higher form of society, which we call socialism, is long overdue. It has become a matter of life and death for our species – as well as for many other species with which we share this planet.

Socialism as we understand it (we also sometimes call it communism) should not be confused with the system of party-state dictatorship that used to exist in Russia and still survives in a few countries today. Nor should it be confused with the more limited goal of achieving social reforms at the national level within capitalism. As capitalism has expanded into a worldwide system socialism also needs to be established on a global scale.

The WSM exists solely for the purpose of establishing world social-

ism, which it defines as ‘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.’ The WSM currently consists of parties in Britain, the US, Canada, India, and New Zealand and groups in other countries.

If you are reading the literature of our movement for the first time, you may be struck by the fact that we do not propose reforms to mitigate problems within capitalism. This does not mean that we consider all such reforms useless. And we can understand why so many people try to improve the situation without taking on the whole social system. Campaigning for reforms is better than suffering in silence.

However, prolonged and strenuous efforts to achieve reforms have yielded little in terms of long-lasting benefit. The companies whose interests are jeopardized by reform have well-paid lobbyists who are most ingenious in finding ways to undermine reform legislation and make a mockery of it. Reforms won at great cost by one generation of working people are easily undone at a later time. Indeed, we are living at such a time right now. What sense does it make always to be fighting to regain what has already been gained and then lost? We prefer to jump off the treadmill and devote our limited time and energy to pursuing a different strategy – tackling social evils at their source.

Stephen Shenfield,
General Secretary of the WSPUS

Photo by James Ferguson of Financial Times



ferguson

The US–China Confrontation

Tensions rise in tandem with China, threatening US hegemony

With the closure of China's consulate in Houston and the American consulate in Chengdu, the confrontation between China and the United States moves up another notch.

Not such a big deal, you say? But other recent developments are more worrying.

Following her re-election in May, Taiwan President Tsai Ingwen made it clear that Taiwan is unwilling to negotiate unification with China on the terms set by Beijing. Since then China has stepped up its military exercises near Taiwan, sailed warships around the island, and flown fighter jets into its airspace.

More clashes have taken place in the Himalayas, along the poorly defined border between India and China.

The National Defense Authorization Act 2021, passed by the Senate on July 23, includes an armaments program called the Pacific Deterrence Initiative,^[1] which has bipartisan support and is 'aimed at countering China's rise.' The program is not all that costly, as armaments programs go: its allocation is 'only' \$7 billion for the next two years – a mere ½% of the Pentagon's current annual budget of \$738 billion. What worries me is the destabilizing nature of many of the armaments – especially

the hypersonic missiles, which combine the speed of ballistic missiles with the maneuverability and stealth of cruise missiles.

The situation continues to deteriorate in the South China Sea, where China's claims to sovereignty are challenged both by the US and by local states like Vietnam and the Philippines.^[2] Hu Bo informs us in *The Diplomat*^[3] that 'the China–US rivalry in the South China Sea is certainly growing' and that there are 'daily operational confrontations' between naval vessels and military aircraft – but then assures us that 'war is still some way off.'

Whew, what a relief! Still some way off!

But hold on. *How far off? Years? Months? Weeks?*

In analyzing a confrontation like that between China and the United States, it is helpful to distinguish three general sources of conflict:

Resources and trade routes

First, states are constantly struggling for control over trade routes, markets, and resources. This kind of

struggle is specific to the capitalist world order.

Thus, the struggle in the South China Sea is a struggle for access to deposits of oil and natural gas (global heating be damned!) and to fish stocks. It is also a struggle for control over the main trade route linking the Pacific with the Indian Ocean.

Another relevant example is the struggle for control over deposits of rare earth metals, which are essential to the manufacture of modern electronic devices. China used to be the sole source of these substances. When it suddenly restricted their export in 2010, a storm of righteous indignation swept Japan and the West.^[4] The development of alternative sources – in particular, in Greenland^[5] – is gradually weakening China's monopoly.

The 'geopolitical' struggle

The second source of conflict is the 'geopolitical' struggle among states for regional and global military and political supremacy. This kind of struggle is *not* specific to capitalism, although it is specific to class society. It goes back thousands of years

and is an unavoidable consequence of the division of the world into separate states.

A very common type of geopolitical struggle occurs during periods when one or more formerly dominant powers are in decline and one or more rising powers are challenging their dominance. Specialists in international relations call the formerly dominant powers 'status quo powers' and their challengers 'revisionist powers.'

In World War Two the revisionist powers were Germany, Italy, and Japan, whose rulers felt excluded from earlier carve-ups of the world and now sought their 'place in the sun.' The war reduced most of Europe and much of Asia to ruins, so that in 1945 the United States emerged as the world's dominant power. In the course of time its dominant position came to be challenged first by the Soviet Union and later by China, now the leading revisionist power.

At the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century China's ruling elite concentrated on accumulating its power potential and abstained from active self-assertion in world affairs. The new leadership under Xi considers that the time has now come to realize that potential. China is accordingly expanding its presence in underdeveloped countries – above all, in Africa with its abundant mineral and forest resources. In its own region the near-term strategic goal is to gain full control over the marine zone within the 'First Island Chain.'

A rational ruling elite would be realistic in assessing the shifting balance of power and make corresponding adjustments to its policy.

The trouble is that ruling elites are not always rational. In particular, the ruling elite of a formerly dominant power finds it painful and humiliating to adjust to its decline. It is these feelings that generate the danger of war. Thus, the British ruling elite were emotionally attached to their empire and took ages to come to terms with the fact that 'Britannia' no longer 'ruled the waves.' The American ruling elite still inhabit a mental Cloud Cuckoo Land in which they are the rightful masters of the world. It is agonizing for them even to imagine withdrawing from beyond the First Island Chain, let alone from Africa.

The *Financial Times* featured a perceptive article by Gideon Rachman entitled: 'America v China: How trade wars become real wars.'^[6] The author argues that the trade war with China unleashed by Trump heightens the danger of a real war, 'because the geopolitical ambitions of a rising China will no longer be restrained by the need to keep the West's markets open.' True, the conflicts associated with trade entail their own risk of war. Nevertheless, the curtailment of trade brings to the surface a deeper and even more dangerous substratum of interstate relations.

The foreign policy impact of domestic politics

Capitalist politicians usually prioritize the demands of domestic politics. Often enough it is these demands that determine their foreign policy orientation. Trump gave his supporters the explicit instruction that they should respond to any criticism of his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic by 'blaming China.' On no account should they address the actual content of the criticism.

And just as Trump lays the blame for his own failures on China, so do his Democratic opponents lay the blame for their failures on Russia. And in just the same way do the Chinese rulers lay the blame for their failures on the United States.

Deflecting popular discontent against foreign 'enemies' is an age-old method of political manipulation. Even though this method is used for internal purposes, it inevitably has an impact on international relations and is one of the causes of conflict.

Our message to fellow workers everywhere

Our message as socialists to our fellow workers – here in the United States, in China, and throughout the world – is the same as it has always been. All these disputes that might lead to war – over territory, trade routes, access to resources, geopolitics, and all the rest of it – are disputes among our bosses. They are not our concern. It is they and not we who control territory and exercise power. Our basic position is the same everywhere. Despite differences in language and customs, we have much more in common with one another than we with our bosses. Nothing is at stake that is worth a single yuan or a single cent to us, let alone human lives.

We hope that peace will be preserved. We hope that everyone who is in a position to act in defense of peace will do so. Hand in hand around the four oceans, heart with heart across the five continents, we shall unite humanity and build a new and better world.

-STEPHEN SHENFIELD

Markets are trash

Production for profit is inherently inefficient

I've never wanted to restart a year so bad in my life. We lost Kobe Bryant, Trump almost started World War Three with Iran, and now we're living in a real-life version of *Contagion* that's got us on a trajectory rivaling The Great Depression – and we've barely entered the second quarter. 2020 so far has been absolute garbage. On the bright side, at least this pandemic is waking people up to the fact that markets are garbage too.

I know that many people reading this may already understand what a market is. However, watching a YouTube video of Sam Seder debating a Libertarian before writing this made me realize that I need to clarify the meaning of markets before I demonstrate precisely why they are trash.

The almighty Google sources their meanings from the Oxford Dictionary's website Lexico.com, which defines a market as *an area or arena in which commercial dealings are conducted*.

For example, someone voluntarily calling into a radio show for free doesn't constitute a commercial dealing since no money or commodities have been or will be exchanged. However, the host monetizing the call later does constitute a commercial dealing with the entity that distributes it, assuming that entity is different. In other words, a market only exists when a commodity is directly exchanged for another commodity, whatever happens later. The commodity most commonly



Photo by Todd Seelie on the Guardian

exchanged is money. Markets suck for a lot of reasons, but right now I'll focus on the contradictions between effective and notional demand and supply, as well as on profit.

Lexico.com defines effective demand as:

The level of demand that represents a real intention to purchase a good by people with the means to pay.

In contrast, notional demand is the demand of people who want a commodity but are unable to buy it for some reason, like not having enough money or a ban. Effective supply is the amount of a commodity furnished on the market, as opposed to notional supply, which is the amount of a commodity that would be furnished on a market if there were no market constraints, such as below-average profit margins for the commodity or a ban.

Another critical concept is derived demand, which Lexico.com defines as:

A demand for a commodity or service which is a consequence of the demand for something else.

A good example is Nevada governor Stephen Sisolak ordering temporary closure of all non-essential businesses in the state to curb the spread of Covid-19. The order led to lower derived demand for public transportation since fewer people are traveling to work, drink at the bar, get a haircut, and so on.

The Covid-19 outbreak itself is an excellent example of how effective demand and supply can lead to negative results. It's widely believed that the Covid-19 pandemic started in November of 2019 as a result of consumption of bats or pangolins sold at the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market – a live animal and seafood market in Wuhan, China that also sold the flesh and organs of various exotic wild animals, referred to as *yewei* or bushmeat. The other two major coronavirus outbreaks of the past decade, MERS and SARS – of which Covid-19 is a variant – are believed to have originated in bats as well. Although no one has found evidence of anyone selling bats or pangolins at the market, Covid-19's genetic similarity to another coronavirus found in bats^[1] suggests that it did originate with them and was

most likely transmitted to humans through an intermediate animal – widely believed to be a pangolin.

^[2] Considering that two thirds of the first 41 people hospitalized for Covid-19 had direct exposure to the market,^[3] pangolins could have been sold there — under the table, since they are a protected species. Assuming that was the case, the effective demand for yewei, which is known to have already caused two significant outbreaks this decade, met with the effective supply of yewei. Markets can incentivize the supply of dangerous goods – for instance, bombs, the only use of which is murder, or infected meat, leading to a global pandemic like the one we’re dealing with right now.

Another excellent example of the negative results of effective demand is the impact of Covid-19 on my hometown, Las Vegas. The town’s economy revolves around the Strip, which caters mainly to tourists’ and locals’ leisure activities. The effective demand for goods and services was drastically lowered on the Strip after stay-at-home orders were issued to curb the spread of the virus, causing a domino effect. The lower effective demand for goods and services on the Strip led to lower effective demand for labor on the Strip, causing many workers employed on the Strip to be laid-off. With their derived demand for healthcare coverage and housing coming from their employment, these workers being laid-off led, in economic terms, to them losing effective demand for healthcare coverage and shelter during the pandemic.

I give kudos to Wynn Resorts for committing to pay all their employees through mid-May, even though it may only be because it would be too expensive and time-consuming to bring all their employees back if they

lay them off. Still, I haven’t heard of any other companies committing to that.

Thank god, also, that Governor Sisolak issued a moratorium on all evictions during the pandemic. Still, he did make it clear that any unpaid rents or mortgages would have to be paid after the pandemic, essentially postponing the homelessness of many Las Vegas to a later date.

The absurdity doesn’t end there. A resident at St. Vincent’s – the town’s homeless shelter for men, where I happened to live for about a month – was diagnosed with Covid-19. As a result, they shut the shelter down until further notice as a “safety precaution” — meaning that they wanted to avoid legal liability if other residents got sick. Now they have as many as 500 residents sleeping outside in the parking lot of Cashman Center, sectioned off into “social distancing” boxes. And this is on the same street as hotels with thousands of empty rooms, which are now only a notional supply due to the ban on non-essential business. Even if that were not the case, these homeless men would have only notional demand for these rooms that could help curb the spread of the disease among them, because they can’t afford them anyway. They are basically leaving these residents out to die, since a vaccine may not be available until at least early 2021 – a vaccine for which they may anyway have only notional demand.

Vaccines usually take 2–5 years to be ready for market, but the urgency of the pandemic has experts hoping optimistically that it can be done in 12–18 months. The long timespan is due partly to the complexity of the vaccine development process, but in large part also to the need for funding. Over 60% of vaccine

research and development funding comes from for-profit companies,^[4] which was a major stumbling block in the development of vaccines for SARS and MERS. For-profit companies tend to be hesitant to invest in vaccine development since it’s much more lucrative to invest in other medications. Even if they do invest, a pandemic may pass before they can get a vaccine to market – an outcome that they see as a waste of money. Publicly funded research would be subject to the same sort of prioritization, so the only way to guarantee that we develop vaccines promptly is to remove market forces entirely.

In a socialist society there would be no markets, because there would be no money. Since production would be for use rather than for profit, vaccine research and development would not be dependent on securing investment. It would depend only on having the necessary resources at hand. We would not stop developing a vaccine just because a pandemic has passed; we would continue to develop it, so that we would have a head start in case a future pathogen arises with a similar genetic makeup, as with SARS and Covid-19. Since there would be universal free access to all products, we would have an incentive to stockpile a buffer of supplies so we can isolate ourselves for long periods if that is necessary in order to fight a pandemic. Since healthcare would be free, anyone could get tested, use a vaccine, or get a ventilator without impediment or significant delay. Our decisions would no longer be subject to the anarchy of the market, because we would finally have achieved coordinated cooperative control over production and distribution.

-JORDAN LEVI

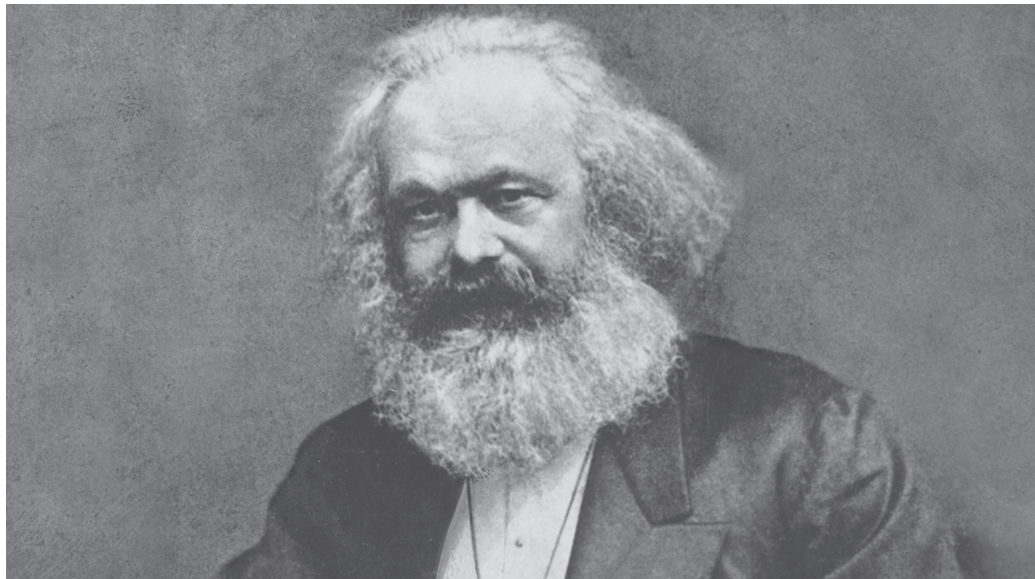
Socialism, Communism, Association —A rose by another name

A free, equal, and voluntary society

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

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

The image here is not of citizens



‘sacrificing’ themselves for the ‘good of society’ but of individuals thoroughly at home in their social world, which is governed by the principle, ‘From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs’.

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

Of course, we can also see such

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

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

Such passages on a future association emphasise how human beings would freely and consciously interact with each other in pursuit

of common goals that also benefit each other. The emphasis on the central role of individuals within a future society runs quite counter to the stereotypes that many people have of Marx's ideas and of the concepts of 'socialism' and 'communism'.

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

economic intervention and regulation by the state.

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

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

-MIKE SCHAUERTE

Photo by marxists.org



The revolution of 7,200 BCE

One of the earliest lower class uprisings

The first known revolution took place 9,200 years ago in a Neolithic settlement in eastern Anatolia – present-day Turkey. There are no written records, but we know about it from archeological remains at a site called Çayönü.

Çayönü began about 8800 BC as a settlement of hunters and gatherers. Seeds indicate the start of farming about 8000 BC, followed by sheep rearing about 7300 BC.

The shift to agriculture was accompanied by the rise of a class society. We know this because there were three houses much larger and much better built than all the rest, with verandahs and stone walls and stairs. There was also a large windowless building that served as a temple. The mansions and temple were arranged around an empty space, like a city square. The mansions contained objects that constituted the wealth of the society: blocks of crystal, stone sculptures, sea shells, finely wrought weapons.

The temple also contained weapons – daggers. These daggers were thickly encrusted with blood, most of it human blood. So were the altars and draining funnels. One chamber was piled high with human skulls and bones. The priests clearly had a passion for human sacrifice.



The ordinary houses of the settlement varied in quality. On the western side was an area where the dwellings were especially substandard – a slum.

For hundreds of years this pattern is reproduced. Then there is a sharp break in the archeological record. Suddenly everything changes.

The mansions and the temple are burned down. The area where they stood is turned into a waste dump. The slum also disappears. New housing is erected, built to a standard design. After that no signs of class differences can be detected.

Documenting these findings in 1989, the supervisor of the excavations at Çayönü, Mehmet Özdoğan, could find no evidence that the sudden change might have been the result of invasion, war, plague, or natural disaster. The only conceivable cause was social upheaval – revolution.

The new classless society spread rapidly through Anatolia and the Balkans and endured for 3,000 years. Women and men were equal. It was a wholly peaceful society. Not a single skeleton bears signs of murder, nor do any of the wall paintings portray scenes of vi-

olence. (Some hunters were killed by animals.)

Of course, life was still hard. And by today's standards life was short. But life was longer and happier during the period of societies without classes than it was for the common people in the class societies that preceded and followed that period.

The historian Bernhard Brosius has shown this by comparing a classless Stone Age settlement with a later class-divided Early Bronze Age settlement in the same region. The technology at the disposal of the Bronze Age settlement was considerably more advanced. In particular, it had a plow that was over twice as productive as the Neolithic digging stick. Nevertheless, infant mortality was 30% higher there than in the Stone Age settlement, while life expectancy was lower: some people in the Stone Age settlement but no one in the Bronze Age settlement lived into their sixties.

Source: Bernhard Brosius, From Çayönü to Çatalhöyük: Emergence and development of an egalitarian society.^[1]

-STEPHEN SHENFIELD

Fall, 2020

FREE
3-month trial
subscription
to the
**socialist
standard**



Available at: worldsocialism.org/spgb/3-free-standards



Against police violence and racism

Hands up, don't shoot

The United States is in the midst of a massive social movement against police violence and racism. As socialists we support this movement wholeheartedly and without reservation.

The movement is leaderless. In this respect it differs from its predecessor – the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Having no leader is one of the movement's strengths. It cannot be weakened by co-opting or assassinating its leader if it has no leader.

The movement does resemble the civil rights movement in another respect. The great majority of its participants are committed to the strategy of nonviolent resistance. This is also a strength of the movement, one that gives it the broadest possible social base. Besides the huge demonstrations in cities throughout the country, many people have helped the movement in other ways – for instance, journalists who have provided sympathetic media coverage, residents who have given refuge in their homes to protestors fleeing police violence, and bus drivers who have refused to transport arrested protestors to police stations.

The steady expansion of the social base of the movement is confirmed by an opinion poll^[1] according to which the proportion of respon-



dents saying they support 'Black Lives Matter' rose from about 40% at the beginning of May to nearly 50% on June 2. (A quarter say that they oppose BLM, a quarter that they neither support nor oppose it.)

There has been plenty of police violence, directed against people protesting against police violence. In many places police have gone beyond the norms that used to keep their violence within certain limits. Representatives of the corporate media have discovered to their shock and horror that they and their equipment are no longer safe from police assault. One video shows a police car plowing into a crowd of protestors – you can see people being crushed beneath the wheels and hear their screams.

At the same time, a division within the police force has come into view. In some places police officers have joined the protests. There have been instances of one police officer intervening against another to protect protestors. This shows that when a movement enjoys broad enough public support the police can no longer be relied

upon to suppress it.

Although the protest movement has been overwhelmingly nonviolent, there has been some violence on its outer fringes. Far be it from us to join the hypocritical chorus of moral condemnation of such violence. It is understandable as a response to the much greater routine violence of the police – violence that is not even called violence unless it kills someone (or unless it takes place in Iran). Above all, the police violence is unleashed against peaceable unarmed people, while the counterviolence mainly targets property. And only an inveterate racist can regret the destruction of monuments to confederate generals and politicians in the southern states.

Nevertheless, as always happens, the fringe violence received intensive coverage in the corporate media, scaring the public and diverting attention from the issues of police violence and racism. It is bound to narrow the social base of the movement. It has provided the pretext for curfews and may yet serve as the pretext for invoking the Insurrection Act and sending in

the army. Trump has been talking a lot about that lately, and the idea has considerable public support. An opinion poll^[2] conducted on May 31 and June 1 showed 58% of voters in favor of 'deploying the military to aid police' and only 30% against. How many of these respondents understood that 'deploying the military' would mean drowning the protests in blood? Fortunately, opposition to military deployment within the power elite, from state and city governments and – most crucially – army generals, has now made Trump change his mind. Americans have been saved from the consequences of their credulity by the common-

sense of the military brass.

Trump is prepared to retreat when he has to, but he does not easily give up. We can expect him to make further efforts to stoke the fires, inculcate fear and hatred, and create conditions that will enable him to realize his dream of a military dictatorship. He will be aided in these efforts by those who have infiltrated the protest movement both from the pseudo-revolutionary 'extreme left' (who do not know what they are doing) and from the reactionary 'extreme right' (who know exactly what they are doing) as well as by agents provocateurs working for the FBI

and other elements of the 'deep state.'

The more people understand what is going on, however, the more likely it is that Trump will fail. There are grounds to hope that the approaching showdown will result in a defeat for the most reactionary forces in American society, opening up the prospect of strengthening the democratic components of the political system and creating improved conditions for the dissemination of socialist ideas.

-STEPHEN SHENFIELD

Photo by Clay Banks on Unsplash



A Cure for COVID-19: A Profit-Making Strategy

Profit Over People

As the pandemic continues, there is an increasingly desperate need for a drug that will be effective against Covid-19 and not too unsafe in other respects.

On March 19, at one of his daily self-display sessions for TV and the press, 'Dr.' Trump promoted hydroxychloroquine – a drug used to treat malaria, lupus, and rheumatoid arthritis – as a remedy for the coronavirus. He did not permit his medical adviser, Dr. Fauci, to say a word. New French and Chinese studies have confirmed that hydroxychloroquine is indeed quite ineffective against Covid-19. It also causes heart complications. Nevertheless, the demand for hydroxychloroquine shot up, jeopardizing supply to the lupus sufferers whose lives really depend on the drug.^[1]

Why did Trump do it? Some suggested that his motive was to push up the value of stock he owns in companies that manufacture hydroxychloroquine. However, Philip Bump of *The Washington Post*^[2] argues that although Trump and his family do own some shares in one such company, the French firm Sanofi, they are worth \$1,500 at most – mere 'loose change' for a billionaire. Moreover, Trump has been equally willing to promote other drugs. The hype is best viewed as



part of Trump's effort to reassure the public and prepare the ground for an early end to the lockdown.

Remdesivir

It is widely believed that the most promising drug is remdesivir, the patent for which is owned by Gilead Sciences, an American company specializing in antiviral drugs. Originally developed to treat Ebola during the West African epidemic of 2014-2016, it was no longer being manufactured when the current pandemic broke out, though the company still had a small inventory. Production has now resumed and is undergoing rapid expansion.^[3]

A preliminary study was based on data for 53 patients with severe Covid-19 who received at least one dose of remdesivir over the period from January 25 to March 7. At follow-up 2–3 weeks later, two-thirds of the patients (36) showed improvement; almost half (25) had improved enough to be discharged; and only 7 had died – an impressively low death rate given the severity of these cases. Admittedly, this was not a properly organized clinical trial: it was very

small and had no control group.^[4]

An interim report^[5] of an ongoing clinical trial at a Chicago hospital, published on April 16, revealed even more encouraging results. At this hospital 125 people with Covid-19, including 113 with a severe form of the disease, received daily infusions of remdesivir. Nearly all made rapid recoveries in fever and respiratory symptoms and were discharged within a week. Equally encouraging results^[6] have been obtained in the UK. Results like these suggest that it may not be premature to speak of a 'cure' for Covid-19.

Six large clinical trials are now underway. In March Gilead Sciences started two transnational trials – one for severe and one for moderate cases. In addition, it is supplying remdesivir without charge for the other four trials: one in the US, one in Europe, and two in China's Hubei Province.

'Compassionate use'

Prior to completion of clinical trials and approval by the US Food & Drug Administration (or by the

corresponding regulatory agency in another country), an 'investigational drug' – which may be a new drug or, as in this instance, an old drug being put to new use – is not usually made available to treat patients, apart from those enrolled in the clinical trials. An exception is made for so-called 'compassionate use' – also known as 'early access,' 'expanded access,' 'managed access,' or 'emergency access.' The approval of the FDA must be sought in each individual case. The application is submitted either by the patient's physician after obtaining the consent of the manufacturer or by the manufacturer at the physician's request. Approval is subject to the following conditions:

- There is an immediate threat to the patient's life.
- No comparable or satisfactory alternative treatment is available.
- The patient cannot be enrolled

in a clinical trial of the drug.

- The potential benefit to the patient justifies the risks of treatment with the drug.
- Providing the drug will not interfere with clinical trials that could support development of the drug or marketing approval for it.^[7]

It is true that this system was not designed with pandemics in mind. Under normal circumstances applications for compassionate use are few and far between. Nevertheless, it provides a legal device that could be used to get timely help to a much larger number of people when an epidemic does occur.

Gilead Sciences began accepting physicians' requests for compassionate use of remdesivir on January 25. As the existence of the drug was not widely known, the number of requests was initially manageable. However, on March 20 Trump talked on his show about rem-

desivir and drew attention to the option of compassionate use. The result was a sudden flood of new requests. On March 23, the company complained that it had been 'overwhelmed' by this flood and suspended intake of new requests except in cases where the patient was a pregnant woman or a child under the age of 18. The number of patients who had received the drug for 'compassionate use' by the end of March was 'over 1,000.'

In an open letter published on March 28, Gilead Sciences CEO Daniel O'Day announced that the company was switching to a new program for receiving and processing requests for 'compassionate use.' It was going to build up a network of 'active sites' (or 'study locations') – hospitals, medical centers, and research centers participating in the program.^[8] Requests could now be submitted in batches, but they had to come

Photo by Prasesh Shiwakoti (Lomash) on Unsplash





Photo by SJ Objio on Unsplash

from one of these hospitals or centers. 'While it will take some time to build a network of active sites,' wrote O'Day, 'this approach will ultimately accelerate emergency access for more people.'^[9]

Ultimately. One of those who did not get emergency access was Dr. Frank Gabrin, who on March 31 became America's first Emergency Room physician to die of Covid-19. He worked at East Orange General Hospital in New Jersey. Although New Jersey is the state with the largest number of 'active sites,' this hospital is not one of them.

Profit-making strategy

There is no need to accept the company's public explanations at face value. Gilead Sciences is clearly very good at projecting a 'caring' image. However, had it really wanted to bring timely help

to as many patients as possible, it could surely have hired and trained the additional staff needed to handle the increased flow of requests. The switch to the new program had the initial effect of halting the flow almost completely. The flow would then increase again, but only gradually, as the network of active sites expanded. This gives the company time. *Ultimately* – in fact, fairly soon – clinical trials would be completed, the company would obtain FDA approval to start marketing the drug, and there would be no further need for any 'compassionate use' programs. What we have here is actually a cleverly designed profit-making strategy.

It was not because the drug was in short supply that Gilead Sciences slowed down the flow of requests for 'compassionate use.' In January 2020 the company had an invento-

ry of 5,000 courses of remdesivir – that is, enough to administer a ten-day course of treatment to 5,000 patients. But by late March over 30,000 courses were on hand. The company aimed to produce over 140,000 courses by the end of May, over 500,000 by October, over a million by December, and (if needed) several million in 2021.^[10]

The size of the inventory was 30,000 courses in late March and must have reached about 50,000 by mid-April. The number needed for the clinical trials did not exceed 10,000.^[11] Even allowing a couple of thousand courses for the expanded-access program, most of the inventory was being held back for later on.

Why did Gilead Sciences hold back most of its accumulating inventory when so many people were in des-

perate need of the drug? The drug courses assigned for clinical trials and for 'compassionate use' at the present stage had to be provided free of charge, as the FDA had not yet given its approval to market remdesivir. Once it did, however, Gilead Sciences would be able to sell its accumulated stock as fast as it can, while continuing to expand its productive capacity. The company will set a high price and make a lot of money.

The strategy paid off. On May 1 the FDA approved remdesivir 'for emergency use'; full approval followed on October 22. The drug is being marketed under the brand name Veklury. A five-day course costs \$3,120. Remdesivir brought Gilead Sciences revenues of \$873 million in the third quarter of 2020, playing the decisive role in generating a quarterly net profit for the company of \$360 million.

In the past companies in India and

China have manufactured generic forms of expensive Western drugs for sale at lower prices, leading to conflicts over intellectual property rights between these countries and the United States. The same thing is set to happen with this drug. In February it was reported that BrightGene Bio-Medical Technology Company, based in Suzhou in China's Jiangsu Province, had succeeded in producing a copy of remdesivir.^[12] The Wuhan Institute of Virology has also applied for a Chinese patent on the drug.^[13]

A better alternative?

Victoria C. Yan and Florian L. Muller of the University of Texas have argued^{[14][15]} that another antiviral drug developed by Gilead Sciences and known as GS-441524 has significant advantages over remdesivir. While closely related to remdesivir, its simpler structure makes it easier to mass produce, only 3 steps being required as against 7 for remdesivir. It also spreads more

evenly through different organs than remdesivir, which tends to concentrate in and may harm the liver and kidneys. There have been no trials on humans, but test-tube experimentation and the use of GS-441524 in treating cats suggest that it is very safe, so that it could be given in higher doses without risk of serious adverse effects.

Yan and Muller urge Gilead Sciences to 'ditch remdesivir' and focus on GS-441524. The company has shown no inclination to take their advice, probably because its patent on GS-441524 is due to expire much sooner than its patent on remdesivir. Perhaps GS-441524 would be a better alternative for patients, but almost certainly remdesivir will make more money for the shareholders of Gilead Sciences.

-STEPHEN SHENFIELD

Photo by SJ Objio on Unsplash



After Shipwreck

The 'human nature' argument falls apart once again

Socialism will never work. It goes against human nature.

So we are often told.

But where do we get our ideas of human nature? Partly by observing ourselves and those around us. Partly also from the books we read and the films and TV programs we watch.

Few books can have had as big an impact on people's ideas of human nature as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. First published in 1954, this novel has been bought by tens of millions of people, translated into over 30 languages, turned into two films (1963 and 1990), and adapted for radio and the stage. As the many study guides devoted to it show, it has been a set book for innumerable students of English literature. And it was the inspiration for Reality Television!

The story line is simple enough. A group of schoolboys are marooned on a desert island. They soon start fighting. Out of their fears and the power lust of a dominant boy they create an idolatrous cult with chants, rituals, and painted faces. The message is painfully clear: the veneer of 'civilization' is skin-deep and once the constraint of authority is removed our inner savage quickly emerges.



But this is fiction – a lesson taught by a misanthropic schoolmaster prone to alcoholism and depression. Now Dutch historian Rutger Bregman has uncovered a true story of how a bunch of real schoolboys behaved in the same situation – a 'real Lord of the Flies' that conveys a very different idea of 'human nature'.^[1]

In 1965 six boys, aged 13–16, got bored with their life at a Catholic boarding school in the Polynesian island kingdom of Tonga, so they 'borrowed' a fishing boat and set sail. They were shipwrecked in a storm, drifted at sea for eight days, and were washed up on a deserted Pacific island where they lived for 15 months before being rescued by Australian adventurer Peter Warner. By that time they had been given up for dead and their funerals had been held.

Even while adrift at sea, these boys cooperated and treated one another as equals:

"They managed to collect some

rainwater in hollowed-out coconut shells and shared it equally between them, each taking a sip in the morning and another in the evening."

On the island

"the boys set up a small commune with food garden, hollowed-out tree trunks to store rainwater, a gymnasium with curious weights, a badminton court, chicken pens and a permanent fire... [They] agreed to work in teams of two, drawing up a strict roster for garden, kitchen and guard duty... Their days began and ended with song and prayer."

The boys survived at first on fish, coconuts, tame birds, and seabird eggs. Later they found wild taro, bananas and chickens in an ancient volcanic crater where people had lived a century before.

When one boy slipped and broke a leg, the others set it using sticks and leaves and looked after him until it healed. Occasional quarrels were resolved by imposing a time-out.

In short, they demonstrated – on a very small scale, to be sure – that socialism is not against human nature and that it can work.

Unfortunately, the owner of the fishing boat did not fully appreciate the boys' achievement. He pressed charges against them and had them imprisoned for theft. It is understandable that he should have been annoyed at the boys, but a more constructive reaction would surely have been to get them to build him a new boat.

A study of post-shipwreck societies

The original version of this article ended here, but after uploading it I discovered an author who has made a comparative study of post-shipwreck societies — Nicholas A. Christakis, *Blueprint: The Evolutionary Origins of a Good Society* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2019).^[2]

Christakis examined numerous historical accounts of shipwrecks and their aftermath, but focused on 20 cases between 1500 and 1900 in which a group of at least 19 initial survivors set up camp on an uninhabited island for 2 months or longer. What factors were most important in determining which of these groups succeeded in ensuring the continued survival and eventual rescue of their members?

Available resources mattered a great deal, of course – both resources found on the island, especially food and fresh water, and things salvaged from the wreck. Another factor that mattered was terrain. For example, the survivors of one shipwreck were handicapped by finding themselves at the bottom of steep

cliffs that they had to climb. And it helped if members of a group had a variety of usable skills.

However, the relationships that developed within a group of survivors also made a big difference. The mini-societies that fared best were those based on cooperation, equity, and altruism. Their members worked together on agreed tasks, shared food fairly, and did not separate into subgroups based on military rank or social status.

One group in this category consisted of survivors from the *Julia Ann*, wrecked in 1855 in Pacific reefs known as the Isles of Scilly. This was an unusually large group of 51 people, all of whom were rescued after 2 months. The ship captain set an example of unselfish behavior right at the start, when he saw the second mate about to remove from the wreck a bag containing \$8,000 belonging to the captain. He told the man to abandon the money and carry a child ashore instead.

In 1864 two ships were wrecked on opposite sides of Auckland Island, south of New Zealand. The two groups of survivors, though on the island at the same time, were unaware of one another. Of the 19 who came ashore from the *Invercauld*, only 3 were still alive when rescue came a year later. They had behaved in accordance with the motto: *every man for himself*. By contrast, all 5 initial survivors from the *Grafton* worked closely together and were rescued after almost two years.

One striking difference between the two kinds of group concerned how the sick and injured were treated. You might think that by looking after 'useless mouths' a group would

lessen its chances of survival. There would be less time to gather food and the food would have to be shared among a larger number of people. Abandoning the sick and injured would seem to be more sensible. Eating them would seem to be even more sensible (cannibalism was actually a rare occurrence). In reality, this sort of crude arithmetic was outweighed by the fact that taking care of the sick and injured helped a group build mutual trust and solidarity. It was on balance an activity that increased chances of survival.

In terms of political structure, non-cooperative groups might be either anarchic or harshly authoritarian. Cooperative groups were more democratic, but this did not exclude an element of leadership. Thus the 5 men from the *Grafton* elected one of their number to act 'not as a master or superior but as a head of family.' It was his assigned duty to 'maintain order and harmony with gentleness but also firmness.' It was agreed that this person could be replaced on a future vote if necessary.

Christakis acknowledges that cooperative groups were relatively few. This should not be too much of a surprise, considering that many shipwreck survivors were traumatized and all had come from competitive and highly status-conscious societies. What is remarkable is that cooperative post-shipwreck societies did exist, demonstrating that even under unfavorable circumstances human beings have the capacity to act together as equals.

-STEPHEN SHENFIELD

Bombs Over Wall St

*When blood's spilled,
workers lose*

On Thursday, September 16, 1920, at 12:01 PM EST, people were gathered on New York City's Wall Street for lunchtime. A horse-drawn wagon made its way through the crowd and stopped across the street from the J.P. Morgan bank headquarters at 23 Wall Street – on the busiest corner of Manhattan's Financial District. The wagon was carrying 100 pounds of dynamite and 500 pounds of heavy, cast-iron sash weights. A timer had been set, detonating the dynamite, sending the weights and glass from nearby windows flying through the air like shrapnel, and ripping the horse and wagon to pieces. The explosion caused over \$2 million in property damage – the equivalent of over \$27 million in 2020, with some damage still visible today – instantly killing 30 people, with eight more dying later from severe wounds, as well as injuring several hundred more, 143 of which severely so.

The Wall Street bombing was never solved, but it's widely believed to have been perpetrated by an Italian anarchist named Mario Buda in response to the wrongful arrest of two of his colleagues, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. All three of them were Galleanists – followers of another Italian anarchist named Luigi Galleani, a staunch proponent of a primarily anarchist political tactic called 'propaganda



by the deed,' mainly associated with acts of violence such as bombings and assassinations aimed at the ruling class. It's worth noting that J.P. Morgan, Jr. was traveling in Europe at the time and that most of the fatalities were young proletarians – part of the labor aristocracy, of course, but members of the working class nonetheless.

The concept of propaganda by the deed sprung from the recognition that the state and capitalism itself is perpetuated via coercion, what could be considered a latent form of violence, and active violence when threatened with even peaceful revolution, whether justified or not. Accepting that exposes poverty as a form of passive social violence and a manifestation of a heavily obscured class warfare in which moral considerations are perpetually set aside for the benefit of the bourgeoisie and at the proletariat's expense. From this vantage point, inaction would also be a form of passive social violence since it directly or indirectly con-

tributes to these circumstances' propagation. From that mindset, virtually every action within a capitalist system would be violence in some form. With nonviolence not being seen as a currently viable option, the question would become how to efficiently leverage violence – precisely what violence they could utilize most effectively to entirely overthrow the capitalist system. Seeing attacks on the ruling class as the most potent means of garnering working-class support since the state's backlash, in their minds, would enrage the workers, their line of march was clear.

There's a kernel of truth in this line of thinking. The theoretical aspect of it holds water to some extent, but the practical side has at least two gaping holes. To be clear, I wholeheartedly agree with the fact that the capitalist system is kept intact through active and potential violence; I don't even think a capitalist would disagree with that. I also agree that allowing millions per year to die from malnutrition,

starvation, treatable diseases, etc. due to poverty is a form of social violence – what Friedrich Engels called ‘social murder’ in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* – and that any actions within the system that aren’t active attempts to overthrow it are at least passively upholding these social evils, qualifying nearly all actions within it as some form of violence. I even agree that the destruction of private property is theoretically justified in these circumstances since that’s the entire backbone of capitalism itself. The disconnect for me is that I don’t think this tactic’s practically sound.

All of these attacks, across the board, have failed to upend the capitalist system, invariably ending in one of two situations. It’s most commonly lead to the wholesale slaughter or suppression and immiseration of the rebels, their allies, and frequently even innocent citizens. The First Red Scare is a prime example. This happens

because the state has the most artillery and won’t hesitate to trample on human rights to neutralize any threats, citing security as an excuse. On the rare occasions that insurrections weren’t quelled, the rebels have always become the new ruling class, leaving workers no better off once the smoke clears, with many of them dead in the crossfire.

Moreover, these attacks don’t usually radicalize proletarians, but more often turn them against the rebels. Class conscious workers may feel empowered, but those that aren’t don’t commonly see the struggle as liberating, but evil instead. With total control of the mainstream media and freedom to control the narrative via those outlets, it becomes much easier to paint rebels as terrorists and even frame them for attacks they never committed if they’re already engaging in violence beforehand. Once a movement’s been demonized, it becomes much harder to

gain any amount of support. In this way, violence can inadvertently rob a movement of support they may otherwise have secured had it utilized peaceful means.

We can only realize a socialist revolution peacefully. A democratic society must be founded democratically. In the words of Friedrich Engels: “The time is past for revolutions carried through by small minorities at the head of unconscious masses. When it gets to be a matter of the complete transformation of the social organization, the masses themselves must participate, must understand what is at stake and why they are to act.” The ruling class may attempt to use violence anyway, but it’s much harder to convince people that entirely peaceful movements are somehow evil. Suppressing peaceful rebels has always bolstered their support anyway.

-JORDAN LEVI



US elections: The lesser-evil fallacy

A futile strategy

As the American presidential election draws closer, progressives such as Noam Chomsky are making their message to vote Biden very much more vocal, declaring Trump is so demented and deranged that a president already displaying symptoms of senility and dementia is preferable and so working people must ignore Biden's ignominious past record. Unlike 2016, there is now no debate whatsoever about who the lesser evil is. The claim is not that the Republican Party and the Democratic Party has actually converged into one on many issues (even if not identical) and that they share so many policies that the choice is between Tweedledum and Tweedledumber.

Our principle is to abstain from voting for either evil and offer neither a mandate to rule. Working people are required to register their rejection of capitalist candidates. Both Trump and Biden are staunch champions of the capitalist system and apologists for Wall Street and the Pentagon. November's election is a contest about who will preside over the 'executive committee of the ruling class'.

The lesser-evil argument is rampant these days. Biden is presented as an ally of African-Americans and other minorities. Trump is depicted as the authoritarian autocrat, suppressing liberties and repressing resistance. The working class

should not support either of the presidential candidates this year, as neither represents the interests of the working people of the United States. Both would continue the assault on the living standards of working people, to boost corporate profits by cutting social services and take back reforms won through hard struggle over the past years. The working class should reject the 'Big Business' candidates and their shared programs of economic austerity and war preparations. There is no such thing as a meaningful choice when it is to pick between cholera and typhoid.

The lesser-evil fallacy serves only to keep the voter chained to the duopoly political system and its two parties. Voting in this election will only hold back the process of forging an independent workers' movement. Workers have had the lesser-evil strategy for many decades and bitter experience indicates that it hasn't worked, and even less chance than ever will it succeed today.

Biden is not opposed to capitalism but out to save capitalism from Trump. His campaign is not based in the working class or on any working-class struggle but upon an imaginary gentler, kinder capitalism. As a politician Biden adopted blatant anti-working-class policies that should shame and condemn any 'socialist' endorsing him. Biden may not be as openly racist as Trump yet he has a history of flirting with segregationists and he has shared with the right wing similar positions on immigration, law and order and foreign policy.

Not voting in the presidential

election is not a matter of principle for socialists. The working class can use the electoral process as part of its struggle for socialism to assume political power and capture the institutional machinery of the state. The Socialist Party holds that there is nothing more dangerous for our fellow-workers than endorsing a class enemy. As genuine socialists we want the working class to become conscious of itself and realise its power to change society. It is the working class versus the capitalist class. Socialism cannot be achieved by electing capitalist candidates but rather by fighting capitalists collectively.

Socialism seeks to eradicate the basic causes for war, poverty and environmental damage which it knows are the products of capitalism. No matter the outcome of the election, no matter who wins, the continued existence of capitalism is assured, none of the consequences of the profit system will be abolished. The Socialist Party stands for socialism now and not later through any electoral bargaining with our class foe. The purpose of the Socialist Party is to promote socialist consciousness and organisation and that will not be accomplished by entering into alliances with any capitalist politician. Biden is not a lesser evil, despite the pronouncements of liberals such as Chomsky and others. Any person who does not tell this truth isn't worthy of the name of socialist. There is only one party in the USA that expresses the interests of our American fellow-workers and that is the World Socialist Party of the United States.

-ALJO



Join our Discord!

<https://discord.gg/5STQea7>



**This link never expires
and has no usage limit**

Publications

- ***World Socialist Review #22*** by World Socialist Party US
- ***Role-Modeling Socialist Behavior: The Life and Letters of Isaac Rab*** by Karla Doris Rab
- ***How the drive for profit devastates our environment*** by WSPUS
- ***Employment: a form of slavery?*** by WSPUS
- ***Reflections on the American way of life*** by Michael Schauerte
- ***Revolution, Not Reform*** by Jordan Levi

all available on amazon.com

US elections: capitalism or capitalism?

*Between a rock and a
hard place*

America is at the cusp of deciding the nature of its future, or at least it thinks it is. It has two scarcely distinguishable options, Democrat Joe Biden and incumbent Donald Trump. The Trump presidency has already had an effect on America that will long outlast his second term, should he get one. The wildfires sweeping the West Coast have had fuel thrown upon them by the rapid destruction of what little environmental regulation there was before Trump. Nominal wages have gone up steadily over the last four years, but cost of living has been growing faster, far outstripping the growth in wages. This is to make no mention of the coronavirus crisis – the United States has seen an exceptionally high death rate – almost 200,000 cases as of writing. Liberals often wax lyrical about the death of ‘American culture’. While Trump’s campaign has undoubtedly had a palpable effect on the way political issues are discussed, how it is a death of American culture is unclear. Indeed, the liberals’ biggest failure was to miss the fact that the seeds for the Trump victory were sown by the Democrat presidencies. And this is the mistake they are repeating in 2020.

Popular populist

The shock from liberal commentators four years ago has still not worn off. The first term of Donald Trump’s



presidency is coming to an end – and liberals are still in such disbelief that he might get a second. There is no attempt to empathise with the many working class Americans who voted for Trump – an immense irony, given editorials in the liberal press such as ‘When A Heart Is Empty’ (*New York Times*, 10 September). In it, David Brooks, a noted moderate conservative, writes, ‘[Trump’s] is not an intellectual stupidity. I imagine Trump’s I.Q. is fine. It is a moral and emotional stupidity. He blunders so often and so badly because he has a narcissist’s inability to get inside the hearts and minds of other people. It’s a stupidity that in almost pure clinical form, flows out of his inability to feel, a stupidity of the heart.’ How do we square this with the fact that Donald Trump won in 2016? Liberal commentators will struggle to.

The truth, contrary to Brooks’ charge of ‘emotional stupidity’ is that Trump has managed to win the hearts and minds of a huge amount of the American working class. How? By going against the establishment. Trump has criticised Hillary Clinton for being a Wall Street shill and a criminal, the Democrats for throwing America into war after war, and the mainstream media for consistently marginalising swathes of views – particularly those favoured by workers. The thing about these claims is that they are all correct. His Twitter, laughable as it may be, is so obviously not ghostwritten. It is unprofessional, direct, unpretentious – one might even say it is, in a rather odd way, down to earth. Trump has not taken himself to be entitled to votes. On the other hand, Joe Biden said to a black voter who was on the fence that, ‘If you have a problem figuring

out whether you're for me or Trump, then you ain't black.' Odd, coming from someone who thought desegregation would lead to his children growing up 'in a racial jungle', and that 'poor kids are just as bright and talented as white kids'. If these comments had come from Trump, they would be plastered on every headline. In this case, the liberal media tries to pass it all off as a joke (*Washington Post*, 22 May). It is precisely this difference between the Democrats and Trump that has led to the polarisation seen in American politics – the working class has realised that the Democrats have done nothing for them. The elitism and political careerism of the mainstream Democratic party has become an unmissable stain on their campaign.

Liberal elite

Of course, Trump's greatest success is that he has managed to convince working class Americans that he represents them. Sure, he has pointed out some of their issues, but the policies he has put in place have done nothing to resolve them. Perhaps this just goes to show how out of touch the Democrats are: even lipservice to the American working class is more than they have done. This might be the backbone of the Trump strategy – if you convince enough working people, but also evangelicals, racists, and so on, you can garner enough of the vote to go back to serving your real constituency: the capitalist class. Trump's policies have been mostly typical rightwing corporate welfare, combined with a sort of protectionism that hasn't been seen in a while. Trump may be marking the end of the neoliberal world order, replacing it with something that could even more straightforwardly be described as American hegemony.

This is actually not entirely accurate: Trump has been forming close alliances with some of the world's most ruthless dictators, notably the Brazilian Jair Bolsonaro, and Russia's Vladimir Putin. Steve Bannon, the former chief strategist in Trump's cabinet, has become somewhat of a left-wing bogeyman, uniting nationalist and right-wing leaders worldwide, including Marine Le Pen in France and Nigel Farage in the UK. Something bigger is at work, and it is keen to captivate 'the masses'. Populism has become a political slur thrown around by liberals that describes this phenomenon. Socialists understand that there is a political and economic elite, whose interests are opposed to those of the workers. It's clear why liberals, the elite in question, want to deny that this is the case. The rightwing has managed to capture the same sentiment but their claims about who the elite is differ from ours immensely.

The Democrats had a left-wing populist candidate – indeed, one who was popular with some Trump supporters: Vermont senator Bernie Sanders. Sanders was the most radical mainstream American politician by far, drawing on a tradition that has been left mostly untouched since Eugene V. Debs, one of the founders of the Industrial Workers of the World. American social democracy could have tried to win the election by tapping into the anti-establishment sentiment that has taken hold of the workers. Of course, the mainstream Democratic Party, as a representative of capital (no different to the Republican Party) would rather have Trump than Sanders. Shenanigans in the election process were conducted accordingly. Even Trump pointed out that the alternative left-wing candidate, Elizabeth Warren, was only in the running to

split the Sanders vote.

There is clear discontent within the American workers: particularly the youth. The majority of millennial Americans are not afraid of the word 'socialism'; in fact they prefer it to 'capitalism'. Liberals are keen to point out that they never lived through the Cold War, and that this might explain their lack of hostility to socialism. Or, it might be that thirty-year olds have lived through four recessions. For a great liberal hero, liberals seem remarkably unkeen to listen to Adam Smith: 'No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable'. Yet, the Democrats, based on nonsensical concerns of 'electability' keep advancing centrist candidates, who are just grist to Trump's mill. The Democrats ran the electability experiment with Clinton. It failed. Yet they are trying it again with Biden. The workers feeling so disenfranchised that 'did not vote' makes a significantly higher category than either Trump or Clinton votes in 2016. Perhaps if 'did not vote' amounted to a vote for no president at all, the country would be better off.

At any rate, the election draws near. If Trump manages to secure another victory, the consequences for the environment will be disastrous. One would hope that working class Americans will have seen through the ruse, but as long as the mainstream opinions are strictly limited to Democrat and Republican, there is going to be little progress. A socialist might reasonably worry that the age-old choice between socialism and barbarism is being made, and that the people are choosing barbarism.

-MP SHAH

Rethinking the politics of the 'lesser evil'

Principle or context?

The World Socialist Movement has traditionally refused to back one capitalist party or politician against another as a supposed 'lesser evil.' It has recommended that in the absence of a socialist candidate socialists should 'abstain from voting for either evil' and instead write *SOCIALISM* across their ballot papers. This stance is reiterated in the context of the forthcoming US presidential election in the October 2020 issue of *The Socialist Standard* (journal of the SPGB, our British companion party)—specifically, in the editorial and in Aljo's article.

Recently I have been rethinking this matter and want to share my thoughts. As I currently occupy the post of general secretary of the WSPUS, I must emphasize that I am expressing personal opinions, not presenting an agreed view of the WSPUS.

The traditional stance of the WSM is based on two arguments.

First, it is asserted that the differences between capitalist politicians are of minor importance – as meaningful as 'the choice between cholera and typhoid,' as Aljo puts it. Rival candidates are likened to the identical twins of an English nursery rhyme – Tweedledum and Tweedledee.



Photo by Maria Oswalt on Unsplash

Second, it is argued that the practice of supporting 'lesser evils' is a trap. It keeps the working class permanently in thrall to capitalism, blocking the growth of an anti-capitalist alternative or any movement independent of capital. In *World Socialist Review* 22 (pp. 75-80) I identify a recurrent pattern. The disillusionment that follows the election of a 'lesser evil' prepares fertile soil for the rise of the next populist demagogue. A vote for a 'lesser evil' is therefore – indirectly – also a vote for a 'greater evil.'

The second of the two arguments is a strong one. However, the first seems to me an overgeneralization.

Tweedledum and Tweedledee?

True, very often there does appear to be no great difference between rival candidates. However, I see no reason why this must *always* be so. Capitalist imperatives place limits on the policies that governments can pursue, but within these limits

there is considerable scope for differences.

In the United States, for example, the Republican Party has closer ties with fossil fuel interests, the Democratic Party with Wall Street. Recent years have seen a divergence in foreign policy orientation, with the Democrats focused on Russia as the main adversary and the Republicans on China. It may be said that differences of this sort are of no concern to the working class and in most cases that is so.

However, some differences between one politician and another do affect the working class. I came across one example recently reading Victoria Johnson's book on the Seattle and San Francisco general strikes (*How Many Machine Guns Does It Take to Cook One Meal*, University of Washington Press 2008). In 1934 San Francisco employers appealed to the federal government to send troops to suppress strikers in the city. Previous experience led them to expect a

helpful response, but the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt refused to oblige. A bloodbath was averted. The difference between FDR and his predecessors in policy regarding strikes and trade unions was surely 'meaningful' in this instance.

Returning to the present, it may be argued that at least some of the differences between Trump and Biden do matter a great deal. MP Shah, author of another article on the US election in the October *Socialist Standard*, evidently thinks so: 'If Trump manages to secure another victory, the consequences for the environment will be disastrous.' I am not sure. The difference between Biden and Trump in environmental policy is that between highly inadequate regulation of business activity and no regulation at all. Consequences for the environment will probably be disastrous even if Trump is defeated, although even an outside chance of human survival is preferable to the certainty of extinction.

A threat to democracy?

Of special concern to many people is the unprecedented threat that Trump poses to the democratic elements in the US political system. There is ample basis for such concern. Besides interviews with Noam Chomsky (e.g., truthout.org, August 11), I refer the reader to the series of seven editorials published by *The Washington Post*, starting September 22, under the heading 'Our Democracy in Peril' and to Barton Gellman's article in the November 2020 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Trump has illegally appointed officials without congressional ap-

proval. He has sent federal troops to cities, against the will of their mayors, to confront peaceful protestors. He is systematically purging federal employees and military officers considered insufficiently subservient to himself. His new appointee as postmaster general is slowing down the delivery of mail in order to block mail-in ballots. He has refused to promise to leave office if he loses the election.

Most alarming of all is Trump's reliance on the support of extreme right-wing and white-supremacist militias like the Proud Boys and the Boogaloos, whose acts of violence and intimidation he refuses to acknowledge or condemn – despite the evidence presented in a recently leaked FBI report.

The claim that Trump represents an American variety of fascism no longer seems farfetched. As socialists we cannot be indifferent to such a prospect. Even if we remain at liberty, which is by no means guaranteed, we could hardly be effective in our work of spreading socialist ideas in an atmosphere of pervasive 'patriotic' terror.

So what?

Even if Biden is clearly the 'lesser evil' in this election, it does not necessarily follow that socialists should give him their wholehearted support. The long-term interest of the working class and of human survival dictates that such support be withheld from any capitalist politician.

Support for an establishment politician, however justified its motivation, is a slippery slope that easily leads to the loss of any radical perspective. Just consider how Bernie

Sanders has changed his tune. At the time of the Democratic Party primaries he dared expose the dirty secret of Biden and his other establishment rivals – their financial dependence on – and consequent subservience to – big business. This truth-telling was crucial to his popular appeal. Now, as Bernie begs his reluctant supporters to vote for Biden, the truth-telling has disappeared. Bernie encourages us to take Biden's promises at face value, despite the man's sorry record, and no longer even mentions his ties to capitalist interests.

As socialists we face a real tension between the short-term and long-term interests of humanity and the working class. We cannot sacrifice the short term to the long term: after all, we have to pass through the short term in order to reach the long term. Nor can we sacrifice the long-term to short-term considerations. A compromise of some sort is required. Our first duty is to be as clear and frank as possible in presenting the situation as we see it. As for the choice between not voting, casting an invalid ballot, and tactical voting for Biden in order to oust Trump, let our fellow workers think things through and decide for themselves. They can manage without our advice.

-STEPHEN SHENFIELD

How I Became a Socialist

One of our comrades tells the story of his journey to class consciousness

My adoptive father Norman, who was born on January 6, 1897, had spent his early life toiling in the mines of Missouri. Norman had fled north in the 1930s to what is commonly called 'Chicago Land' or the 'Calumet Region.' Even though Lake County, where we lived, was in Indiana and not Illinois, it was so dependent on industry with connections to Chicago and Lake Michigan that it – alone among the counties of Indiana – observed Daylight Saving Time in order that its workforce would be in synch with the financial center that supported its industrial production.

For over 30 years Norman was employed at a steel mill owned by the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company. When I was about 7 years old his union, the United Steel Workers Union (USWU), declared a strike for higher wages and better working conditions. The strike continued for about a year. I remember Norman talking at our dinner table to my adoptive mom, Lois, about the One Big Union (OBU) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). He said that those unions had tactics quite different and more effective than those of the USWU.

According to all of the TV programming that I seem to remember from this time, the USSR was trying to



take over the world. It was not a popular position to hold that 'socialism' was acceptable in the United States. I knew nothing about 'socialism' at that time and thought that the Soviet Union was a socialist country. I did not realize that the unions Norman was praising were oriented toward socialism. It was all over the head of a seven-year-old kid.

When I was about sixteen my friend Larry and I were smoking some very potent Afghan hashish. Larry floated the suggestion that 'if everybody worked for free, everything would be for free.' It was so simple, yet so elegant. I was impressed by this brand-new bright and shiny idea! It resonated with me on a visceral level.

I went to a federal prison in Ashland, Kentucky – the Ashland Federal Youth Center – for a couple of years for selling 55 grams of methamphetamine to an undercover FBI agent. I earned my way into their Study Release College Program, which allowed me to attend classes at Ashland Community College

(ACC). It was there that I came across the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and published in London in 1848. I had heard in one of my history classes that 1848 was 'a year of world revolutionary activity'! I then read Volume 1 of Marx's *Capital*, published in 1867. The language seemed turgid, but it had been written over a hundred years earlier and on my second reading I translated it in my mind into modern American English. It all made sense to me. I learned that the main principle of socialism was: 'From each according to ability, to each according to need.' I was becoming a firm socialist. Socialism was no longer, literally or practically, a 'pipe dream'!

Marx's words implied, to me at least, free access to all of life's needs. I recalled what Larry had said through a cloud of euphoria-inducing smoke years before: 'If everybody worked for free, everything would be for free.' I was convinced that socialism would remove almost all incentives to war and bring about a society more

Fall, 2020

homogeneous than the present economic system, based on wealth and the power of wealth.

In 2007 I came into contact with Karla Doris Rab, granddaughter of Isaac Rab, who had founded what evolved into the World Socialist Party of the United States – a party zany enough to think, as I did, that ‘free access’ was possible now that the systems of production had developed such fantastic productive capabilities. If production were redirected toward satisfying human needs rather than ‘spread-sheet profit criteria,’ free access would present no problem. ALL that needed to be done from here on out was to convince the world! I

became a member of the WSPUS in 2009 and learned of my admission to the party on my birthday. Of all the mistakes I’ve made during my life, joining the party shines out especially brightly as not being one of them!

Socialism is NOT a pipe dream. It is perhaps the sole way to prevent the climate chaos produced by manufacturing that is in the service of profit-making and therefore uses the least expensive and most readily available sources of energy – carbon-based fossil fuels. ‘For profit’ production is poisoning the earth’s atmosphere.

The primary goal of socialism has

always been to liberate the workers, the working class, the 99%, from their position of wage slavery. This remains the goal of socialism, but now socialism is also needed to save the planet and its inhabitants from certain destruction at the hands of the ‘master class,’ the capitalists, who buy your life from you one hour at a time for a paltry wage so that they can live lives of power and plenty while we strive with all our diligence to put supper on the table for ourselves and our families.

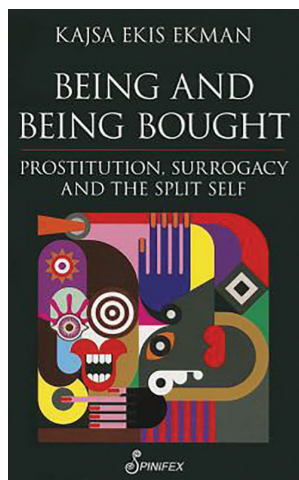
Yes, Socialism — We Have the Technology!

-JOE HOPKINS

joerhopkins.net



Reviews



Being and Being Bought by Kajsa Ekis Ekman

I came across Kajsa's TEDx Talk on Youtube about 2 years ago and thought it was really good, so I decided to look up some of her work and found out about this book. I've had it in my mental backlog of books I've wanted to read after finishing Marx's major works, but I decided to take a quick break and knock some of those out so I could add some reviews to the magazine, and I'm glad this was one of them.

The first half is about the exploitative nature of prostitution and how its defenders obfuscate from the actual circumstances surrounding it – e.g. the danger, mental harm, etc. – in favor of an idealized conception of those circumstances, framed as not being exploitative, but empowering. She touches on how Cartesian dualism has to be taken for granted for any of this to make sense and how reification also rears its ugly head.

She segues this nicely into the topic of surrogacy in the last half using an identical approach. My favorite quote by far has to be this one:

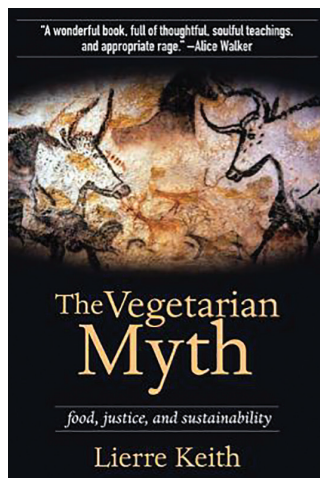
'Kutte Jönsson compares a woman's womb with other possessions when

World Socialist

he discusses whether surrogacy is exploitative: "[I]magine that you find a lost wallet—are you then exploiting the owner?" (2003, p. 158). Now, I don't know about Jönsson's world, but as for mine, I have never seen a lost womb lying around on the street.'

10/10 just for that. Highly recommend.

-JORDAN LEVI



The Vegetarian Myth by Lierre Keith

Towards the end of my SuccDem Berniecrat phase I was basically addicted to Steven Crowder's Youtube videos since I wasn't aware of any socialists making sense in the transgender debate (I didn't find out about Magdalen Berns until after she died, but thank god more radicals have started to speak out since). I found out about Lierre through her interview with Steven around that time and wanted to read this book ever since.

The title's pretty self-explanatory: it's a polemic against vegetarian and vegan diets. She was a vegan for 20 years, so it's also partly a memoir of her own experience and journey back to eating meat. She explains many of the health issues she encountered along the way and gives scientific explanations why. I loved it so much because, not only is Lierre's writing

extremely engaging, but she also references her statements to hell and back.

One thing I wasn't expecting was her to explain that the Standard American Diet – recommending low cholesterol and high carbs – is unhealthy, too. She explains that grains and carbs could be fueling the 'diseases of civilization', rather than cholesterol and fat. The Paleo diet's intrigued me since I watched a documentary about it on Netflix in late 2011 or early 2012. That touched on the potential issue of grains and carbs too, but I don't remember it getting into the science at all, which Lierre thankfully does. She also doesn't explicitly advocate for a Paleo diet, but some of her references point to Paleo sources.

My only gripe's that it has kind of an anti-civ tinge to it. I could be wrong, but it seems like she doesn't think technology and a healthy planet can co-exist. I still highly recommend it, but I'd be interested in hearing her opinion on how successful she thinks the strategy of this next book might be.

-JORDAN LEVI



Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things by William McDonough and Michael Braungart

I can't fully remember exactly how

I found this book, but I think it was during a Google wormhole where I was trying to figure out if it might ever be possible for bioplastics to be durable and conductive enough to replace metal. Regardless, Waste = Food – that’s the entire premise of this book. Waste is an inevitable byproduct of production, but rather than manufacturing products in ways or with chemicals that are destructive to the environment then sending them to landfills to pile up and slowly cause even more destruction – what the authors refer to as ‘cradle to grave’ – we could instead produce them in ways that are not only sustainable and ecologically friendly, but also ecologically beneficial – what they refer to as ‘cradle to cradle.’ Rather than products being recycled and degrading in quality – what they more fittingly call downcycled – they could instead be upcycled, retaining the same level of quality.

I love the fact that they gave various examples of companies they’ve worked with to achieve this goal, as well as products that could potentially be made in the future. I also love the fact that they accept this isn’t a silver bullet, that we may not be able to avoid all toxic products indefinitely for now at least, and opting to plan around that while still acknowledging how much of our environmental problems this could solve anyway. The only bone I have to pick is a brief reference they make to the socialism of Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* juxtaposed to the laissez-faire capitalism of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, claiming they’d both failed:

Unfair distribution of wealth and worker exploitation inspired Marx and Engels to write *The Communist Manifesto*, in which they sounded an alarm for the need to address human rights and share economic wealth. “Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers

... they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the foreman, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself.” While capitalism had often ignored the interest of the worker in the pursuit of its economic goals, socialism, when single-mindedly pursued as an –ism, also failed. If nothing belongs to anyone but the state, anyone can be diminished by the system. This happened in the former USSR, where government denied fundamental human rights such as freedom of speech. The environment also suffered: scientists have deemed 16 percent of the former Soviet state unsafe to inhabit, due to industrial pollution and contamination so severe it has been termed “ecocide.”

I’d imagine anyone reading this already knows that socialism hasn’t failed, because it’s never been tried, and that the USSR was state capitalist, regardless of their name. It was never socialist, not only because socialism couldn’t exist in one country, but also because they had a state, money, and classes, just to name a few reasons. Aside from that one grievance, I’d highly recommend this book.

-JORDAN LEVI



Gender Ideology by The State Media

I can’t remember who it was, but I found this documentary within a few hours of it dropping after somebody I follow on Twitter retweeted The State Media’s announcement of it being posted on Youtube. It does a great job of laying out some of the major issues surrounding self-ID such as

inadequate safeguarding for children, women’s prisons, sports, etc. It also debunks some pretty prominent talking points, such as the allegedly high transgender suicide rate and that questioning self-ID is somehow bigotry – which they call bigoteering. They touch on the fact that intersex conditions don’t disprove the sex binary – that even people born with these conditions are still either male or female – and that there’s no such thing as a male or female brain or being born in the wrong body, but I don’t remember them getting into the biological differences between males and females or how those differences develop in humans and other species. Still, I think it’s a more than adequate introduction to this topic.

-JORDAN LEVI



(My) Song of the Season PROGRESSION FREESTYLE 1 By Kojey Radical

I’ve said it countless times off record, and it wouldn’t be right if I didn’t say it here: the British music scene is criminally slept on. Drake’s thankfully done his part to try and change that, but even artists he’s cosigned haven’t been able to fully break through here in America. Virtually unmatched in his versatility, and even without a major cosign I’ve seen yet, I genuinely think Kojey could be the British MC to finally crack the code.

I found out about Kojey from scrolling through the subreddit r/socialistmusic, where someone posted a link to the music video for his song ‘Open

World Socialist

Hand.' I watched it and immediately fell down the rabbit hole, watching at least 5 more of his music videos and a couple interviews, angry that I hadn't found out about him earlier. He's released a couple other dope singles so far this year, but I basically had this one on repeat for an entire week after it dropped.

The video's impeccable as usual, and the beat has this ethereal bell melody that fits perfectly with the rest of what sounds to me like more UK drill-inspired elements. The subject matter touches on things like fake Black Lives Matter supporters and people flexing jewelry while they're in debt, with some crazy flow switches thrown in too. He also dropped a sequel to this a couple days ago that's just as good. Kojey's definitely somebody you should keep your eye on.

-JORDAN LEVI



Government Tropicana

by Lex Amor

I listened to this album after Kojey posted it on his Instagram story the day it dropped, and was the absolute furthest thing from disappointed. It clocks in at what I consider to be the perfect album length – 30 mins – and every track slaps harder than a wife that got cheated on. My favorite's definitely the first song 'Quarter Century,' but other stand outs are 'Mazza,' which I believe was the first

single to drop back in January, 'Plant Your Feet (P.Y.F),' and 'Odogwu (Free-style).' With this much raw talent, I'm sure there's big things in store for her in the future.

-JORDAN LEVI



A Long Road Traveled

by Han Hing Quang

Translated from Vietnamese

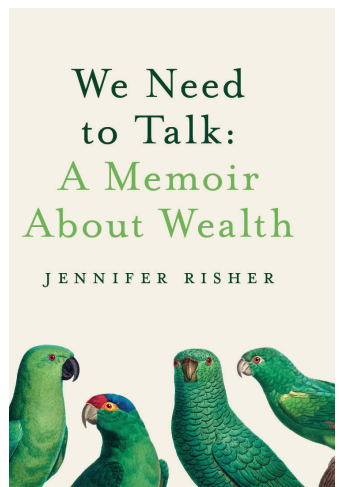
by Ai Hoa Han

Han Hing Quang, my late father-in-law, was born in 1926 at Dap Da, a small town in South-Central Vietnam, to a Hainanese family of traders in medicinal herbs. He became involved in the fight of the Vietminh to overthrow the colonial regime that France had imposed on Vietnam in the 19th century. After the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the Diem regime installed in Saigon by the US started killing Vietminh cadres in the South. Quang, however, was among those rescued by evacuation to the North, where he worked in the field of foreign trade. He also served as an interpreter in several official Vietnamese delegations to China and North Korea. This gave him an inside view of the deterioration of relations between Vietnam and China that culminated in the border war of 1979. Like other Vietnamese of Chinese ethnic origin, he found himself in a dangerous position and left the country. Eventually he and his family settled in England, where he wrote these memoirs. The Vietnamese text was translated by his daughter.

There are many memoirs by 'communists' (not as we use the word but in the conventional sense) who start out with a blind faith in the cause and gradually become disillusioned. This story does not fit the usual pattern. Quang seems to have been aware of the ugly and ridiculous aspects of the movement at a very early stage. Yet he never completely abandoned loyalty to the 'Vietnamese Revolution.'

A pdf file containing the memoirs is embedded in my personal website. Go to this URL and follow the link: <http://stephenshenfield.net/places/east-asia/vietnam/214-memoirs-of-han-hing-quang-a-long-road-traveled>

-STEPHEN SHENFIELD



We Need to Talk: A Memoir about Wealth

by Jennifer Risher

Jennifer Risher and her husband were lucky enough to land managerial jobs at companies – Microsoft and Amazon – that grew very fast and provided their managers with generous stock options. Within a few years they found themselves rich beyond their wildest dreams. The author describes what it felt like to become rich – the problems of adaptation as well as the pleasures of enhanced wealth and status. She expresses some remarkably liberal views: she supports wealth redistribution and a welfare state and thinks she should

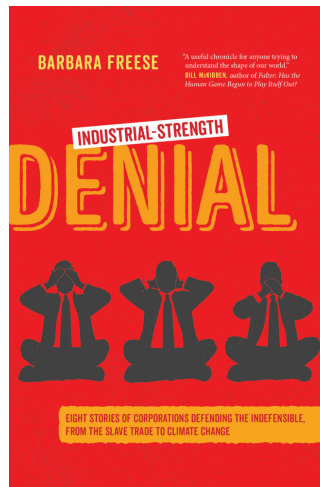
pay higher taxes. At the same time, she is upset by the hostility to the rich felt by many poor people.

Risher writes as though she somehow represents the rich as a class, but I don't believe that is so. She speaks as someone who has come into money late in life and is still not fully accustomed to being rich. In her social milieu there are still relatives and friends who remain poor; she helps them financially and worries that they may be spending her money in ways of which she disapproves (on drugs, alcohol, pets, etc.). And she is not very rich. The idea that billionaires should not exist 'sounds reasonable' to her.

By contrast, most of those born into great wealth take it for granted as their due, so they do not share the author's moral unease. They are much more isolated from ordinary people. To take one of Risher's own examples, the moderately rich person boarding an airplane may hear a second-class passenger curse her under his breath as she enters the first-class section. But the very rich person need never experience such unpleasantness, because *he* flies by private jet. As might be expected, he is likely to be much less liberal than the author in his views.

F. Scott Fitzgerald is famous for saying that the rich 'are different from you and me.' Risher does not agree; for her the rich and the poor are '99% the same.' Fitzgerald, however, was referring to 'the very rich' – those who 'possess and enjoy early.' He knew what he was talking about.

-STEPHEN SHENFIELD



Industrial-Strength Denial: Eight Stories of Corporations Defending the Indefensible, From the Slave Trade to Climate Change

Barbara Freese

The author's subject is the 'alternate realities' crafted by business interests in defense of their profit-making operations despite massive evidence of the harm they are causing. The eight case studies that constitute the core of the book span 240 years – from the anti-abolitionist propaganda of British slave traders and planters in the late 18th century up to today's campaign by fossil fuel corporations to deny climate change. Some of the cases will probably be unfamiliar even to the well-informed reader – for example, the early 20th-century promotion of the newly discovered and highly radioactive element radium as 'a wonderful stimulant' and as a way to light watches up in the dark.

Other issues covered are: car design as a cause of road accidents; the dangers to health of tobacco and leaded gasoline; the threat of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) to the ozone layer; high-risk subprime loans as a cause of the financial crisis of 2008.

Remarkably, Freese finds that corporate obscurantists have used the same basic methods for over two centuries – methods such as accusing opponents of hypocrisy, shifting moral responsibility onto others, and exaggerating how badly any interference in their business would disrupt the economy.

Also considered is the question of whether commercial publicists believe their own propaganda. The evidence here is mixed: some of them are cynical liars, while others are more or less self-deluded.

Although the author acknowledges the role of institutional factors – in particular, the limited legal liability of corporate managers and shareholders – her primary focus is on cultural factors. She attributes malpractice in the financial sector to a 'culture of exploitation' and seeks to 'shift the social norm toward the public interest.'

Freese's approach to possible remedies is strictly reformist. Her most radical idea is that under the influence of the 'shifting social norm' corporations may gradually become less single-mindedly profit-driven. You might have expected that the sheer scale of the horrors exposed in her case studies would have impelled her at least to contemplate systemic change. But no, she does not even mention such a possibility. I suppose that some sort of social norm is to blame. Never mind. Books like this one are still of enormous value to the socialist, full as they are of facts that demonstrate why we need to abolish a system based on production for profit.

-STEPHEN SHENFIELD

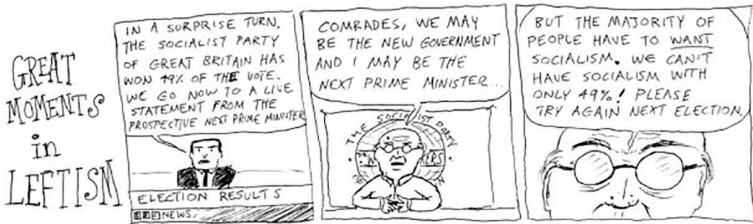
Funnies

Bernie



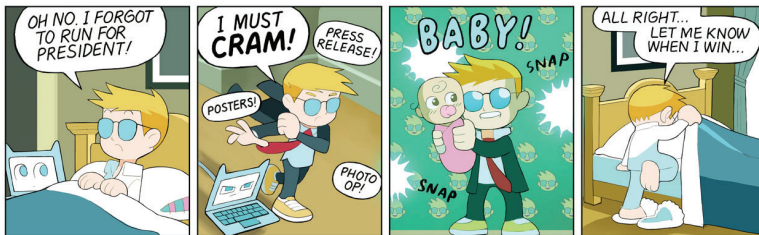
BERNIECOMIC.BLOGSPOT.COM

© Great Moments In Leftism

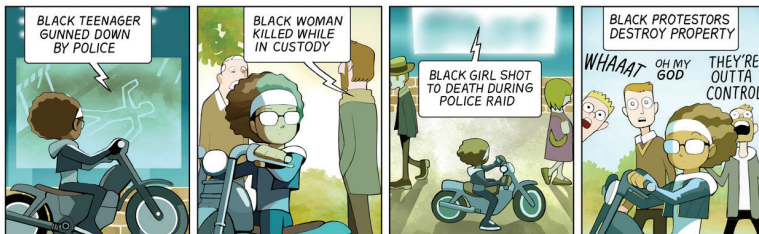


It's only fair that I add this one, because it is pretty funny

© Great Moments In Leftism



© Tatsuya Ishida



© Tatsuya Ishida



Voodoo Pork
@Voodoo_Pork

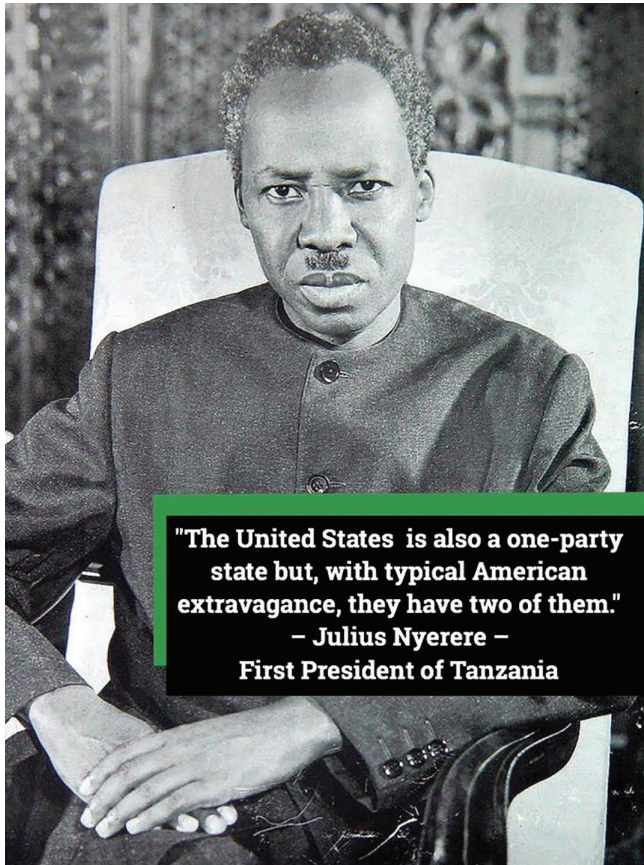
You know how your parents used to call every console a "Nintendo"?

That's how conservatives use the word "socialist" to describe everything to the left of hunting the homeless for sport.

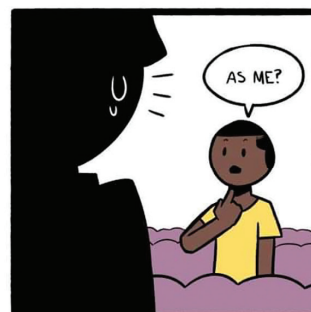
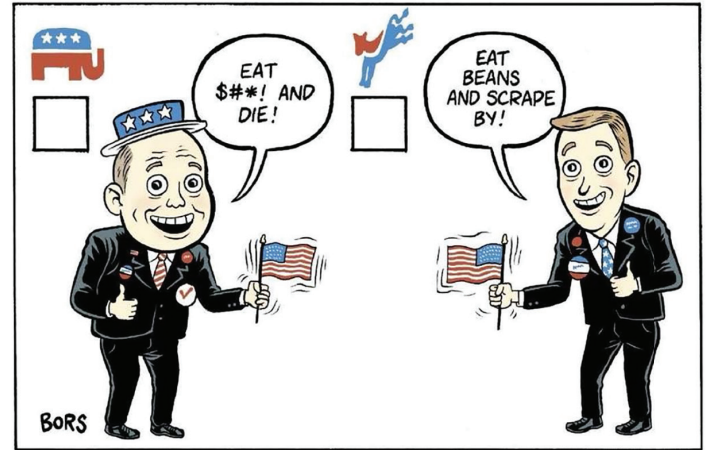
When someone tells me they are fed up with their shitty job, shitty boss, shitty pay and this shitty system.



Me: *works 8 good hours then ask for
basic essential needs*
Capitalism:

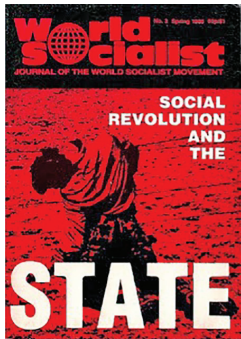


please vote.



Flashback

(Editorial from the Spring 1985 issue of the *World Socialist*)



Elections, such as those which took place last year in the United States, Canada and Australia, are thus about who shall fill the top posts in the state and run affairs in the interest of the established capitalist class. The choice that is offered is not really a choice at all since the main parties involved all stand for the same system. This is obvious in the case of America where the Republican and Democratic parties are openly mere rival gangs of political place-hunters, but is also the

Contacts

World Socialist

case in countries like Britain, Australia and New Zealand where one of the contending parties claims to represent the interests of the working class. Experience over the years of "Labour" governments shows that in practice they are just as anti-working class as any government formed by openly pro-capitalist parties. This is inevitable since the capitalist system can only function in one way: as a profit-making system in the interest of the profit-taking class. No government could change this economic law of present-day class society. On the contrary, all governments are obliged to abide by it and apply it whatever their original intentions might have been.

Politics in these countries is a game of ins and outs remote from the lives of ordinary people who, even though they participate in this game by exercising a "choice" when given the opportunity, generally do so without illusions since they know by

experience that it makes very little difference to their everyday lives which party—which particular gang of place-hunters—wins. Politics is seen, and presented, as a sort of never-ending TV serial in which various media-puffed personalities vie with each other for power and place. No wonder most people don't want too much to do with "politics". This is how it is today, but it need not always be so. When socialist understanding has spread sufficiently amongst the majority wage and salary earning class in these countries elections can be turned against the minority capitalist class. But until this happens the spectacle will go on and the use to which democratic forms are put will remain a farce that is an insult to the intelligence of thinking men and women.

<http://socialiststandardmyspace.blogspot.com/2017/05/for-democratic-world.html>

World Socialist Party US

1810 E Sahara Ave #503, Las Vegas, NV 89104
contact@wspus.org

Stephen Shenfield

Providence, RI
sshenfield@verizon.net

Michael Schauerte

Japan
japan.wsm@gmail.com

Joe R. Hopkins 075523 (F-2 2123-L)

Calhoun Correctional Institution
19562 SE Institution Dr
Blountstown, FL 32424

Jordan Levi

Las Vegas, NV
contact@jordanlevi.blog

more at <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/contact>

Object

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

Declaration of Principles

The Companion Parties of Socialism hold that:

- 1.** 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 consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labor alone wealth is produced.
- 2.** 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.** 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.** 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.** This emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
- 6.** 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, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and overthrow of plutocratic privilege.
- 7.** As political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interest of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
- 8.** The companion parties of socialism, therefore, enter the field of political action determined to stand against all other political parties, whether alleged labor or avowedly capitalist, and call upon all members of the working class of these countries to support these principles to the end that a termination may be brought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labor, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

References

The US–China confrontation

- [1] <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/02/opinions/mark-hannah-william-hartung-confrontation-china/index.html>
- [2] <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/2000s/2009/no-1256-april-2009/material-world/>
- [3] <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/china-us-military-confrontation-in-the-south-china-sea-fact-and-fiction/>
- [4] <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/2011/2010s/no-1281-may-2011/material-world-2/>
- [5] <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/2012/2010s/no-1297-september-2012/material-world-greenland-new-field-capitalist-e/>
- [6] <https://www.ft.com/content/5a93b060-25d3-11e8-b27e-cc62a39d57a0>

Markets are Trash

- [1] <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-7960423/The-Latest-Shanghai-index-drops-8-virus-outbreak-grows.html>
- [2] <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-from-bats-to-pangolins-how-do-viruses-reach-us/a-52291570>
- [3] <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2820%2930183-5>
- [4] <https://www.thebalance.com/biotech-business-4073286>

The revolution of 7,200 BCE

- [1] http://www.urkommunismus.de/catalhueyuek_en.html

Against police violence and racism

- [1] <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2020/6/3/1949954/-Civics-Daily-Tracking-Poll-Shows-Dramatic-Increase-in-Support-for-Black-Lives-Matter-Movement?detail=emaildkre>
- [2] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicholasreimann/2020/06/02/58-of-voters-support-using-military-to-help-police-control-protests-poll-finds/#29c2cac2417a>

A cure for Covid-19: a profit-making strategy

- [1] <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/927307>
- [2] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/04/07/trumps-promotion-hydroxychloroquine-is-almost-certainly-about-politics-not-profits/>
- [3] Information is provided on the company's website: <https://www.gilead.com/>
- [4] Twenty-two patients were in the United States, 22 in Europe or Canada, and 9 in Japan. Jonathan Grein et al., 'Compassionate Use of Remdesivir for Patients with Severe Covid-19,' The New England Journal of Medicine, April 10: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2007016>
- [5] <https://www.statnews.com/2020/04/16/early-peek-at-data-on-gilead-coronavirus-drug-suggests-patients-are-responding-to-treatment/>
- [6] <https://www.mirror.co.uk/science/coronavirus-patients-recovering-quickly-after-21881526>
- [7] <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/public-health-focus/expanded-access>
- [8] At the time of writing (April 16), 46 sites are active in the following countries: the United States (31), France (4), Germany (2), Italy (3), Spain (2), Switzerland (2), and the UK (2). In the US the states with the largest numbers of sites are New Jersey (8), California (7), New York (5), Florida (3), and Louisiana (3). See here: <https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT04323761>
- [9] <https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/gilead-ceo-pledges-affordable-remdesivir-as-promising-Covid-19-drug-expects-clinical-data>
- [10] <https://www.gilead.com/purpose/advancing-global-health/Covid-19/working-to-supply-remdesivir-for-Covid-19>
- [11] I am not in a position to calculate this figure exactly. The total number of participants in the six trials is 8,301. Some subgroups receive only a placebo; others receive courses of 5, 10, 15, or 20 days. Sizes are not given for all the subgroups.
- [12] <http://www.gabionline.net/Generics/News/Chinese-company-makes-copy-of-patented-coronavirus-treatment-remdesivir>
- [13] <http://www.gabionline.net/Generics/General/MSF-challenges-hepatitis-C-patent-in-China>
- [14] <https://www.statnews.com/2020/05/14/gilead-should-ditch-remdesivir-and-focus-on-its-simpler-safer-ancestor/>
- [15] <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/pdf/10.1021/acsmedchemlett.0c00316>

After Shipwreck

- [1] <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/09/the-real-lord-of-the-flies-what-happened-when-six-boys-were-shipwrecked-for-15-months>
- [2] https://www.amazon.com/Blueprint-Evolutionary-Origins-Good-Society-ebook/dp/B07F67B9P4/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=1589590891&sr=8-1

Fall, 2020

World Socialist

Front Cover

Photo by Kayle Kaupanger on Unsplash

Editorial Committee

Stephen Shenfield

Michael Schauerte

Jordan Levi

World Socialist Party of the United States

1810 E Sahara Ave #503

Las Vegas, NV 89104

contact@wspus.org

<https://www.facebook.com/WSPUS>

<https://www.instagram.com/wspus/>

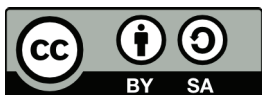
<https://twitter.com/wspus>

https://www.tiktok.com/@wspus_

© 2020 World Socialist Party US. All rights reserved where not stated otherwise.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

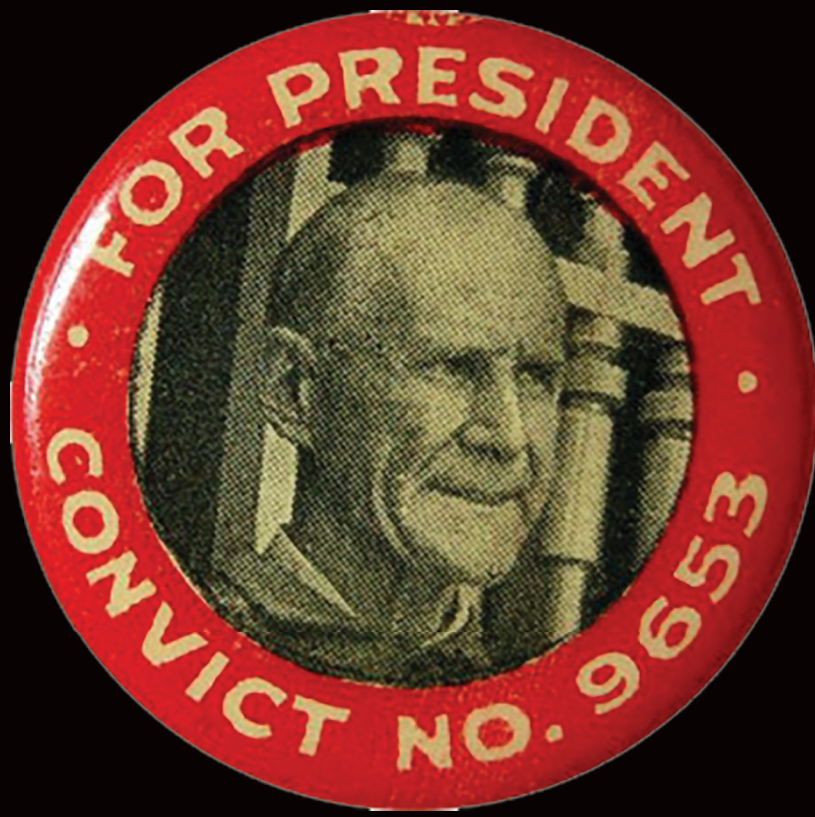
To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>



ISSN 2765-8740 (print)

ISSN 2765-8759 (online)

Thanks for reading!



"It is infinitely better to vote for freedom and fail than to vote for slavery and succeed." - Eugene Debs