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FREE

BE REALISTIC: DEMAND THE IMPOSSIBLE.



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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

Following the largest voter turnout in US history and what might more properly be called an “election fortnight,” after the time it took to call a winner officially, Joe Biden was declared the 46th President of the United States. That level of engagement was undoubtedly fueled more so by distaste for Trump than enthusiasm for Biden, but that hasn’t stopped the incumbent and other Republicans from falsely citing voter fraud and attempting various means to overturn the result, with a rumor of at least 140 expected to challenge the Electoral College’s certification of Biden’s victory on January 6. Still, their strategy’s unlikely to pay off, and Biden’s inauguration will take place on January 20, granting voters the not-so-lesser evil they gave the

mandate to rule.

I say not-so-lesser, because – from most angles – Biden’s presidency won’t be much of an improvement if it’s an improvement at all. We can reasonably assume that without any reference to Biden himself. All we have to do is look at some of his cabinet nominations so far.

Lloyd Austin, a board member of Raytheon and team member of a private equity fund that invests in defense contractors, has been chosen for Secretary of Defense. For Secretary of State, Biden chose Antony Blinken, who served as Deputy Secretary of State under Obama. Although Biden campaigned on ending US support for the war in Yemen, Blinken

increased weapons shipments to Saudi Arabia, which is directly involved in the conflict. Tom Vilsack, a known ally of Monsanto, bagged Secretary of Agriculture. Neera Tanden, who’s gone on record in support of ending Social Security, was tapped for Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Assuming the Senate confirms all of Biden’s picks, this spells more empty platitudes, warmongering, and austerity until at least 2024. By then, one can only hope that more of the same old neoliberal policies will push enough people to hop off this seesaw and either vote for a genuine socialist if given the opportunity or order an absentee ballot to spoil it by writing across the word ‘SOCIALISM.’

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Drugs to Drive You Nuts: Delights for the Depressed

BY STEPHEN SHENFIELD

The dark side of antidepressants

Patrick D. Hahn, *Prescription for Sorrow: Antidepressants, Suicide and Violence* (Samizdat Health, 2020)

At the end of World War Two, large stockpiles of a rocket fuel called hydrazine were sold off cheap. Drug companies looked for ways of putting it to profitable use. Hoffman-LaRoche converted it into a drug – iproniazid – that killed the TB bacillus and – an unexpected bonus – ‘energized’ people suffering from depression. The first antidepressant was born.

Antidepressants have grown into a massive and hugely lucrative industry. The size of the world market was estimated in 2019 at \$14.3 billion. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, 13% of American adults surveyed between 2015 and 2018 had taken antidepressants in the past 30 days. Use was highest among women and the elderly, reaching 24% among women aged 60 and over.^[1]

A bonanza

That, mind you, was before Covid-19.

The pandemic is a bonanza for the



Photo by Nastya Dulhiier on Unsplash

antidepressants business. Thanks to the increased stress and anxiety, the market is expected to *double* to \$28.6 billion in 2020 before stabilizing around \$19 billion by 2023.^[2]

But if antidepressants help people in the throes of depression why, you may ask, resent the shareholders of drug companies for making money out of them?

One point, as Patrick Hahn shows, is that the benefit derived by some consumers is largely due to the ‘placebo effect’: sugar pills would do just as well. A much more important point is that while these ‘medications’ do help some people they harm others.

Common toxic effects of antidepressants can be physical, mental, or both. They include dizziness, low blood pressure, compulsive and uncontrollable bodily movements (akathisia), hallucinations, delusions, recurrent nightmares, and violent outbursts.

Tragic cases

The author focuses on the most violent effects of antidepressants – suicide and homicide, often prefigured in dream and fantasy and then enacted in reality. He draws on the work of honest psychiatrists, mainly Dr. Peter Breggin and Dr. David Healy – and recounts individual case histories. He demonstrates the role that psychotropic medications are likely to have played in famous ‘rampage killings.’

One of the tragic cases that Hahn examines is that of the adolescent friends Michelle Carter and Conrad Roy. Conrad shares with Michelle his drug-induced nightmares, fantasies, and suicide plans. He blackmails her emotionally by warning that if she reveals his plans he will hate her. Seeing no other way out, she encourages him to kill himself and have done with it. He will be happier in heaven, she thinks.

On these grounds Michelle was charged with involuntary manslaughter, found guilty, and sent to prison for 15 months. Dr. Breggin, testifying as an expert witness

for the defense, argued that the youngsters were struggling to cope with the unrecognized effects of harmful drugs – for instance, they had both ‘experienced’ encounters with the devil in their dreams. Both, in his view, were victims of psychiatric abuse.

Suppressing information

The author explains in detail how the pharmaceutical companies – aided and abetted by a feeble Food and Drugs Administration, corrupted academics, and corporate media – conceal and suppress information with the potential to undercut their sales and profits.

In order to obtain FDA permission to market a new drug, for example, a company has to present the results of two trials that show the drug performing significantly better than a placebo. However, a company is perfectly free to conduct trial after trial until it eventually obtains two ‘successful’ trials and keep secret the results – and even the existence -- of all the

‘failed’ trials.

Again, companies report side effects of drugs not directly and in full but only through a set of codes. And for some reason no codes are assigned for suicidal or homicidal impulses or acts! These are subsumed under a vague category like ‘emotional lability.’

A business expense

There have been quite a few cases of antidepressant victims or their surviving relatives suing pharmaceutical companies. Some plaintiffs have been awarded impressive damages. Thus in 2012 GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) paid \$3 billion in compensation for harm done between 1997 and 2005; in 2013 Johnson & Johnson agreed to pay \$2.2 billion to settle claims of illegal marketing (it had encouraged physicians to prescribe Risperdal for children – a drug that the FDA approves only for adults).

By ordinary standards these are large sums. But they are not large

enough to ruin a big pharmaceutical company – or even deter continued wrongdoing. These are companies that reckon their profits not in billions but in *tens* of billions of dollars. When GSK announced its \$3 billion settlement its stock price actually rose. Presumably it wrote the sum off as a business expense.

Even minnows ‘energized’

Antidepressants enter our natural environment when excreted in urine and feces or thrown away. We all consume them in our water supply. Our rivers contain measurable amounts of Prozac and researchers have discovered that it affects fish behavior. Minnows that imbibe Prozac spend less time in hidden spaces and react more slowly to threats from predators. They reproduce less, get edgy and aggressive, and may even kill their mates.^{[3][4]}

Indeed, why should the joys of drugging be for human beings only? ☹

Photo by Adam Nieścioruk on Unsplash



Black Wednesday

BY JORDAN LEVI

The State places property over people once again

Some of my 2020 highlights so far have been: wage cuts all spring (but too little to have been eligible for unemployment benefits), having to cancel a short tour my twin, Roméo, had booked, being stuck in my room *more* often (which I was shocked to find out was physically possible), and wearing a facemask more times than I'd worn pants. COVID-19 ruined my year more thoroughly than I would've ever guessed possible back in January. The only consolation's that much of the world endured this torment along with me.

Restrictions hadn't even been fully lifted across America before we reminded the world of our exceptionalism by reporting over 100,000 new cases of COVID in a single day for the first time in early November,^[1] about one month after the second wave of infections began. We broke 200,000 reported new cases in a single day on Black Friday, unsurprisingly — less than a month later — as prospects only look bleaker with winter on the horizon and "herd immunity" unlikely until the third or even fourth quarter of 2021.^[2] Some state's Governors have issued another round of stay-at-home orders after recognizing this, one of whom being California's Gavin Newsom.^[3] While Newsom and his family were



Photo by Damian Dovarganes on AP News

quickly able to quarantine at their estate in Fair Oaks — an upscale suburb of Sacramento — after two separate exposures,^[4] the lion's share of his constituents aren't afforded that same luxury.

Aside from the fact most Californians aren't able to work from home, roughly 151,000 of them don't have a home in the first place — a 16% increase from 2019^[5] — over 66,000 of which are in Los Angeles County alone — a 12% increase from 2019.^[6] As temperatures lower and the virus's body count rises, it'd only make sense that the most vulnerable of those stuck outside would get themselves inside by any means necessary for their safety. Assuming rent to be too expensive — with the average in LA being \$2,524 as of February 2020^[7] — and shelters or couch surfing not to be an option for varying reasons, then squatting would seem like the most reasonable decision. That brings us to the topic of this article, but first, some

brief background info.

California's highway system started being planned out in the 1930s,^[8] including a portion that would later be known as I-710. Work on its southern stretch began in 1951, so in the 50s and 60s, the California Department of Transportation started buying properties in El Sereno — a neighborhood in Northeast Los Angeles — and in surrounding areas planned to be cleared to make way for the 710's northern section. The ribbon was cut to open a small segment of its northern stretch in 1965, but protests from residents of the surrounding area prevented a 6.2-mile gap in the freeway from being closed. After multiple decades, a few lawsuits, an environmental review, and numerous other options being rejected, it was decided that the funding that'd been raised to fill in the gap would be put towards regular street improvements instead in 2017^[9] and that any references in state law to filling in the gap would be delet-

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ed in 2018.^[10] Now Caltrans owns properties in and around El Sereno that are currently vacant — some of which having been so for decades — even though plans for this freeway extension were abandoned more than three years ago.

Caltrans owns 460 properties in the El Sereno area, 163 of which sat vacant in 2019,^[11] and only 37 being listed as “uninhabitable” in 2015, though that number’s likely to have risen by now. Once an underground tunnel became the last-ditch effort to close the freeway gap in 2015, Caltrans allegedly began preparing to sell more than 400 of those homes, but 72-year-old Roberto Flores — a member of United Caltrans Tenants — claims they’ve been neglecting their properties, saying: “They’re not fixing them, and they’re not renting them.” With California having a shortage of around 1.4 million homes for low-income families, all these issues converged and left this iron glowing red hot.

Enter Reclaim and Rebuild Our Community, a group of Angelinos who’d been living inside their cars, in encampments, or on families couches — some along with their children — due to financial hardship and having no access to affordable housing. Inspired by a similar group in Oakland,^[12] RORC seized their first home in El Sereno on March 14th,^[13] along with more a few days later,^[14] deciding to risk arrest rather than death from this pandemic. I’m unable to find any articles that say precisely when, but

apparently, they were kicked out because they decided to return the day before Thanksgiving.

On Wednesday, November 25th, 20 families affiliated with RORC began moving into the El Sereno homes to reclaim them,^[15] some families including infants as young as three months old and seniors older than 70. The group set up a GoFundMe page 2 days earlier^[16] and sent Governor Newsom a letter seeking his support on the 25th as well, embedding their Youtube video of RORC members reading the letter^[17] in the GoFundMe page on the same day. Members finished a news conference around 7 PM, then — mere hours after moving in — California Highway Patrol began raiding the homes to remove them. On Friday, CHP said that 62 people were arrested on Wednesday and Thursday in connection with breaking into the properties and refusing to vacate, all being charged with trespassing and burglary. CHP also said another 41 people were arrested on Thursday evening and charged with unlawful assembly, blocking officers from approaching occupied homes, and deliberately blocking the right of way, all of whom being cited and released.

Councilman Kevin de León — who was elected in March to represent LA’s 14th Council District, which includes El Sereno — posted that his office has worked to secure hotel vouchers and “other rapid rehousing solutions” for those in immediate need while negotiating with the state to secure permanent

support for families, saying he reached out to Governor Newsom Friday morning to “highlight the need to restore these remaining properties.”^[18] While his effort to help those families in their time of need is commendable, the reality’s that — even if all of them are quickly placed in affordable housing — squatting will still happen since there’ll still be thousands of Californians sleeping in their cars, on couches, or in encampments. Regardless of pandemics, vacant housing, or inclement weather, capitalism will never fully eradicate homelessness because it isn’t profitable to do so.

There are around 31 vacant housing units per homeless person in the United States,^[19] with many either being hoarded or left to rot rather than used by those in need. While most would consider this a moral failing, morality has no direct impact on the “viability” of a commodity or service in a market economy. Capitalism is based on “no profit, no production” and “no money, no sale.” Private property itself — being different from personal property — is based on the right to deprive others of its use,^[20] regardless, in most cases, of how desperately someone may need it. As long as access to life’s needs is regulated by profitability, there’ll always be those forced to go without them. Only socialism — an economic system based on production for use — can render homeless citizens being forced out of vacant homes a thing of the past. ☺

What's Going on in Belarus?

BY STEPHEN SHENFIELD

An interview with Dmitry Kosmachev, a member of the Minsk Socialist Circle, about the situation in Belarus, the current protests, and where they may lead

Stephen Shenfield: In the 1990s I made visits to five of the new post-Soviet republics – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan. I got the impression that the situation for working people in Belarus was relatively tolerable. Only in Belarus did I find no evidence of people engaged in a desperate struggle to survive. The regime was authoritarian but enjoyed wide support. There were no serious ethnic conflicts.

How accurate was my impression? And how has the situation changed since then?

Dmitry Kosmachev: You are quite right. Even today things are better here in Belarus than elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. In Belarus, unlike Russia and other republics, large-scale privatization of factories, land, and farms has not taken place. Soviet-era industry has not been dismantled and is still competitive. Our trucks, tractors, and buses are bought not only by post-Soviet states but also by some Third World countries. We import



The banner reads: 'Honest elections. A tribunal. Freedom for political prisoners.'

our dairy products from other former Soviet republics, not from the EU. We even continue to export clothes and shoes to other former Soviet republics, despite the ubiquity of cheap Chinese imports.

This situation is reflected in our social structure. For one thing, we have preserved a large industrial working class. And with industry remaining in the hands of the state Belarus, unlike Russia and Ukraine, has no 'oligarchs' – extremely rich capitalists who influence politics and create their own parties. The levels of crime and corruption are relatively low here, thanks in part to tough measures. The death penalty still exists in Belarus.

SS: Would you say then that Belarus has a more just society than Russia and Ukraine?

DK: No, the preponderance of state capitalism in Belarus does not make it a welfare state. For example, Russia has more progressive labor legislation than we do. In Russia there are several alternative

trade union federations, while Belarus has only one trade union independent of the state. It was created and registered under Lukashenko's predecessors. In Belarus it is almost impossible to conduct a strike in compliance with the formal requirements of labor law. Russian law requires an employer who wants to dismiss a worker to provide two weeks' warning and three months' severance pay, while most Belarusian workers are employed on the basis of short-term – usually annual – labor contracts, so that at the end of the year they can be fired without benefits, simply by not renewing their contract.

There has been partial privatization in Belarus. Fully state-owned enterprises have been transformed into joint-stock companies in which the majority of shares are held by the state and a minority by the director. This gives the director a financial interest in the performance of the enterprise, but he remains dependent on the state and can always be dismissed if deemed disloyal.

Photo by Homoatrox on Wikimedia Commons

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SS: How has the political situation changed since the 1990s?

DK: Lukashenko did have wide support in the 1990s. He did not need to cheat in order to win elections. People were afraid of what was happening in Russia and Ukraine – the destruction of the Soviet-era economy, the instability, the rising crime, the corruption. In Belarus industrial enterprises continued to operate. Crime was low, as I said.

At that time the opposition did not have wide support. They were nationalist intellectuals with an orientation toward Poland. Nor were they very honest. In fall 2001 the following joke made the rounds:

Who launched the attack on the World Trade Center? The Belarusian opposition, so as not to have to account for grants received from the US government.

In the presidential election of September 2001 Lukashenko inflicted a crushing defeat on the opposition candidate.

But as they say, ‘dripping water wears away the stone.’ There grew up a new generation of young people. They often traveled to Poland and Lithuania – countries that have close historical connections with Belarus – and there they saw a completely different level of freedom. Meanwhile Lukashenko was coming to resemble a Latin American dictator. He started to take his youngest son Nikolai with him everywhere he went. The boy is now 17 years old. This, clearly, is our Kim Jong Un.

The protests that followed Lu-

kashenko’s victory in the presidential election of 2006, influenced by similar protests in Ukraine, showed that by then the opposition had acquired a broader base. Many previously ‘non-political’ students took part. They set up a tent camp on Kalinovsky Square, one of the central squares of Minsk. It stood there two weeks before being brutally broken up by special police.

SS: What led up to the current protests?

DK: The presidential election of 2020 was carefully prepared. Would-be candidates whom Lukashenko considered serious rivals were barred from standing. Thus he did not allow the registration of Viktor Babariko, former chairman of the board of Belgazprombank (Belarus Gas Industry Bank), which has links to the huge Russian gas company Gazprom. The famous blogger Sergei Tikhanovsky, who also intended to stand, was arrested on farfetched charges.

All the same, Lukashenko needed a sparring partner, a rival whom he would easily defeat. He thought that a woman would be a weak candidate – men would never vote for her – so he allowed the registration of Sergei Tikhanovsky’s wife, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya. But it turned out that voters were fed up with Lukashenko and most were willing to vote for a woman. The president and his team falsified the results. According to the official figures, Lukashenko won with 80% of the vote. But most people were more inclined to believe Tikhanovskaya’s claim that she had won at least 60%. She has now been allowed to go abroad.

Falsification of the election results triggered an unprecedented outburst of public indignation.

SS: How do the current protests compare with protests in the past?

DK: First, they are much more massive. The demonstration in Minsk on October 25 was 100,000 strong, which is quite impressive for a city of two million. There have been separate marches of students and women.

Second, these protests have occurred throughout the country, even in the smallest towns. Past protests were confined to the capital.

Naturally, such large and nationwide protests have a broader social composition than earlier protests, the participants in which were mostly students, people in the arts, small businesspeople, and workers in the Information Technology sector.

SS: Have the protests been accompanied by strikes?

DK: In August the opposition managed to organize a quite powerful nationwide strike movement. They tried again at the end of October, after Tikhanovskaya called for a general strike, but this time they failed.

SS: When you mention ‘the opposition’ I suppose you are referring primarily to the Belarusian Popular Front?

DK: No, no, you remember the Belarusian Popular Front from the 1990s, but today this organization is virtually non-existent. The oppo-



Photo by Homoatrox on Wikimedia Commons

sition is now represented by other structures. Since the 90s it has become somewhat less nationalist and more pro-Western and liberal. One of the main points in the economic program of the opposition's presidential candidate was privatization.

SS: Is there a significant section of the population that actively supports the regime?

DK: Lukashenko has many supporters, but their support is passive in nature. When he needs people to attend a rally, he summons school

teachers, workers for public utilities, and others who depend on the state for their livelihood.

SS: Should libertarian socialists support the protest movement? What is your opinion?

DK: My opinion is that they should not. Definitely not! Libertarian anti-authoritarian socialists should support neither the dictator nor the liberals.

Unfortunately, however, there are several other groups of self-styled 'anti-authoritarian socialists' who

are taking an active part in these protests. This is true of anarchists, the Green Party, and the Belarusian Left Party 'Just World' – former 'communists' who oppose Lukashenko and adhere to the platform of the Party of the European Left [a coalition of 'communists' and 'social democrats' in EU countries–SS].

A band of four anarchists even tried to start a guerrilla war. They crossed the border from Ukraine illegally with weapons, committed several acts of sabotage, and were arrested while trying to return to

Ukraine.

SS: The political situation in Belarus is developing against the background of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Is there any connection between them? How is the pandemic affecting Belarus?

DK: The number of people diagnosed with Covid-19 in Belarus is 106,000, of whom 91,000 have recovered. About 1,000 have died. For a country with a population of 9.5 million this is not catastrophic.

Lukashenko has responded to the threat of Covid-19 with much less drastic measures than those adopted in Russia and Ukraine. Throughout the spring and summer no restrictions were imposed on economic activity. On May 9 the authorities even held a national football competition and a military parade to mark the 75th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany. Planes from abroad were allowed to land at the airport, though passengers were required to self-isolate for two weeks, as were people who had been in contact with Covid-19 patients inside the country.

The relatively weak official response to the pandemic may have contributed to the protests in a small way. Many people have voluntarily limited their contacts and worn masks and gloves as a sort of challenge to the authorities.

SS: Is Russia in any way involved in the situation in Belarus?

DK: Lukashenko has usually tried to maintain his independence by balancing between Russia and the EU. There is tension in his relationship

with Putin. On the eve of the presidential election there was even a scandal with the arrest of Russian mercenaries who — claimed the Belarusian authorities — had come to Minsk to stage an armed coup against Lukashenko. In fact, they were just waiting for a plane to Turkey to fly from there to Africa. At Russian airports almost all foreign flights have been canceled on account of the pandemic, whereas Belarus remains open for flights.

But when Lukashenko faced mass protests he abandoned anti-Russian rhetoric and ran to Putin for help. And Putin agreed to help. Not, however, by sending troops or special police to suppress protests, but by sending political experts — so-called ‘political technologists’ — to raise the abysmal quality of the regime’s propaganda and improve Lukashenko’s terrible domestic and international image. It is these experts who are to be congratulated for the fact that the propaganda programs of state television channels have become more professional. The hope must be that Lukashenko can learn from the more flexible political system of Putin’s Russia, which provides scope for dissent ‘within the system’ and is more selective in applying repression.

SS: Are there any countries apart from Russia with which the Belarusian regime has good relations?

DK: Lukashenko considers the Maduro regime in Venezuela an ideological ally. A monument has been erected in Minsk to Simon Bolivar [the anti-colonial leader who is the inspiration for Venezuela’s ‘Bolivarian Revolution’—SS] and one of the city squares has been

renamed in his honor. State-owned Belarusian construction companies have built several blocks of apartments in Caracas.

SS: Please tell us about the Minsk Socialist Circle.

DK: The Minsk Socialist Circle is a group of 30—40 lecturers and students in the humanities at universities in Minsk. It arose out of an optional course of lectures on the history of socialist thought given at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Belarusian State University in 2017 to mark the centenary of the Russian Revolution. Those of us who started the circle shared a felt need to find a new model of society to restart the socialist project that had been discredited by the Bolsheviks. We hold seminars, public meetings, and discussions with representatives of other left-wing organizations.

SS: So the idea is to make people more aware of non-Bolshevik currents in the history of socialist thought, so that they will distinguish between Bolshevism and socialism as such — and not throw out the baby with the bathwater.

DK: As Belarus was part of the Russian empire and before that of Poland, its territory was the scene of the activities of many Russian, Polish, and Jewish socialist parties.

SS: Right. My grandmother, who was from Smorgon in the north-western corner of Belarus, was in the Jewish Socialist Bund. But what about Belarusian socialists?

DK: There were Belarusian socialists as well, but fewer of them. And it was also in Belarus that there

arose the first anarchist organizations in the Russian Empire. So our country has a rich tradition of socialist thought – a tradition that was never completely eradicated either through the long years of the Soviet Union or under the Lukashenko dictatorship.

SS: Are you especially inspired by any particular non-Bolshevik tradition?

DK: Yes, we feel a special affinity with those non-Marxist socialists in the tsarist empire who were known in Russian as *narodniki*. There is no satisfactory equivalent of this term in English. It comes from the word *narod*, meaning ‘the people,’ because the *narodniki* believed in ‘going to the people.’ In the 19th century thousands of educated young people went to the villages to preach the ideals of socialism. Hoping to gain the trust of uneducated peasants, they dressed in simple clothes and arranged to work as rural artisans, doctors, and teachers. It was the *narodniki* who formed the People’s Will Party and later the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries.

By the way, Sergei Stepnyak, at whose London funeral William Morris made one of his last speeches, was a *narodnik*.

SS: They also committed acts of terror, didn’t they?

DK: Some did. It was the People’s Will Party that planned and carried out the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881. You see, the first attempts to ‘go to the people’ failed. The peasants distrusted the strangers from the cities and turned them in to the police. That led

some *narodniki* in Russia to resort to terrorism. But the *narodniki* in Belarus never did so. There was a separate Belarusian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, led by a woman teacher – Poluta Bodunova, who died in the Stalinist GULAG.

In any case, there is no longer such a wide gap between conscious socialists and working people. The tradition of ‘going to the people’ can still serve us as an ethical guide.

SS: How many people do you reach?

DK: Attendance at our meetings has risen to about a hundred people. And lectures on Marxism or on the history of the socialist movement can attract hundreds of interested young students. True, that is not much by comparison with the crowds of tens or even hundreds of thousands at mass meetings of the liberal opposition. But just a couple of years ago a mere handful of people came to our meetings.

Now is a good time for socialist propaganda. More and more people are getting disillusioned with the liberal opposition. At the same time, they realize that the Lukashenko regime embodies all the worst features of bureaucratic society in the Soviet era. We do not want to lead people into a new version of the same sort of impasse. That is the focus of heated debates between us and the traditional left parties and groups, who unambiguously associate themselves with the tradition of the Bolsheviks and the Soviet Union. I hope that the ideas of anti-authoritarian socialism will again take root in our country.

SS: Are the members of your circle affected by the current repression?

DK: Yes. Lukashenko is demanding that students who have taken part in the protests be expelled from institutions of higher education. Although we have not taken part in the protests, we too are threatened with expulsion. We may also be deprived of access to the premises where we hold our meetings.

SS: What prospects do you see for Belarus?

DK: In our opinion, the protests are unlikely to improve the situation in the country. If Lukashenko succeeds in suppressing them, there will be less freedom and more repression. If the liberal opposition manages to overthrow the Lukashenko regime, there will be more political freedom. However, a liberal government will probably pursue a policy of privatization. Europe is still the liberals’ ideal. They do not want to know that capitalism is in a deep systemic crisis and they do not want to learn from what privatization has brought about in Russia and Ukraine.

Privatization will create a new class of powerful and wealthy oligarchs and a new split in society. Industry will be dismantled and asset-stripped. Workers will find themselves out on the street with no chance of employment in accordance with their skills, while productive enterprises are turned into warehouses and shopping malls. Agriculture will also be destroyed.

We may then see unfold in Belarus a tragedy similar to what has occurred in Ukraine. The destabili-

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zation of society may lead to confrontation between eastern regions connected with Russia and western regions drawn toward the European Union.

SS: But surely Belarus does not have the sharp cultural and ethnic division between eastern and western regions that characterizes Ukraine?

DK: Belarus has a similar division, even though it is not as sharp. In Grodno, in the west of the country, most people speak Belarusian,

while in the east – in Gomel and Vitebsk – as well as in Minsk the main language spoken is Russian. Ukraine represents a worst-case scenario for Belarus. There are grounds to hope that it will be avoided. Unlike the protests against Yanukovych in Ukraine, which were almost all in the western and central parts of the country, the protests here in Belarus are nationwide. There is no counter-movement for Lukashenko or for joining Russia.

SS: What is the message of the

Minsk Socialist Circle to the citizens of Belarus?

DK: In this situation, we can only appeal to people's reason, remind them of the socialist traditions of our country, and emphasize the need for a system based on social justice, coordination of the interests of all population groups, genuine popular control over public property, and the widest self-government. Our slogan today is: *Neither dictatorship nor privatization, but people's self-government and workers' self-management!* ☺

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#FreeAssange

BY JORDAN LEVI

The US Justice Dept attacks freedom of the press

Julian Assange's extradition hearings have been a brazen example of the US government's corruption. Rather than honoring a real journalist for exposing the war crimes of our military-industrial complex, many government officials instead call for Assange to be punished for heroically informing their constituents of these atrocities. Of course, that'd only come as a surprise to someone naive enough to think most government officials have their constituents' best interest at heart, rather than the best interest of corporations such as those involved in our military-industrial complex, represented by lobbyists who grease the palms of those same government officials. If anyone was still under that illusion before, I hope this case will be their much-needed wake-up call.

I'm sure many of you reading this are familiar with Julian Assange, but for those that aren't, I'll do my best to bring you up to speed. Assange is credited as being the founder of WikiLeaks, which is easily the most prominent news leaks website to have existed so far. Though their website launched on October 4, 2006, they didn't post their first document until about two months later, in December. They had a few high-profile leaks prior to 2010, but they didn't become a household name until April 5 of that year,



Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

when they released a video they titled *Collateral Murder*, in which a crew of US Army pilots flying Apache helicopters fire on a group of civilians, including two Reuters journalists, both of whom died as a result.^[1] In the week following the video's release, WikiLeaks became the search term with the most significant growth worldwide during that week, according to Google Insights.^[2]

That video, along with a slew of other leaks, was later revealed to have been provided to WikiLeaks by former US Army soldier Chelsea Manning, who at that time was still going by their birth name, Bradley Manning. Manning was arrested for those leaks on May 26, 2010,^[3] and was ultimately incarcerated for almost seven years before President Barack Obama commuted their sentence. After leaking Manning's material, US authorities began investigating WikiLeaks and Assange himself to prosecute them under the *Espionage Act of 1917*. Despite this, WikiLeaks continued publishing more damning leaks,

some of which helped spark what's known as the Arab Spring. What began to signal a downward shift in WikiLeaks' momentum was criminal charges levied at Assange after visiting Stockholm, Sweden, in August 2010.

Original Charge

I've read two different accounts of the initial incident that ultimately lead to Assange's extradition hearings, both of which agree on the bulk of events, but with some slightly different details causing each to paint the situation in a very different light. I'll start with the first account, then follow up with some details from the second account that fill in some questionable gaps.

The story mainly involves Julian Assange, of course, as well as two women: Anna Ardin and Sofia Wilen. Anna Ardin was press secretary at the time of the Religious Social Democrats of Sweden, commonly referred to as "the Brotherhood Movement," which is an offshoot of the Swedish Social Democratic Party. Ardin organized

a conference, held in Stockholm on August 14, 2010, at which Assange was invited to speak.^[4] When Assange landed in Stockholm on August 11, Ardin offered him to stay at her apartment while visiting family for a couple of days. Ardin got back home on August 13, and she and Assange had sex that night, both admitting that Assange had worn a condom and that it broke. Assange delivered his speech the next day, and Ardin threw a party at her apartment that night in his honor.

Sofia Wilen had sex with Assange the night of August 16 and again the following morning. He wore a condom the first time, but not the second time. On August 18, Wilen called Ardin and told her she had unprotected sex with Assange, saying she was afraid she might have contracted an STD or become pregnant. On August 20, both women filed criminal charges against Assange: Ardin alleging that he deliberately broke the condom when they had sex and Wilen alleging that he refused to wear a condom the second time they had sex. The first account claims that Swedish authorities questioned Assange, the case was initially closed, then he was told he could leave the country, but that in November 2010, the case was reopened by a special prosecutor who wanted to question him over two counts of sexual molestation, one count of unlawful coercion, and one count of "lesser-degree rape." Assange denied the allegations and said he was happy to be questioned in Britain.

The first account claims that Assange was being accused of continuing to have sex with the women after they'd withdrawn consent,

but the second account gives more details that I feel make way more sense, given the charges. Firstly, Ardin recounts her and Assange's intercourse as being overly aggressive,^[5] which could explain why they hadn't had sex a single other time, even though he slept in her bed for another week afterward. Secondly, Wilen alleged that Assange began having sex with her the second time while she was half asleep, without a condom on, after he'd reluctantly worn one the first time. Wilen said she'd never had sex without a condom before, and even one of her ex-boyfriend's told the police that they'd never once in two and a half years had sex without a condom since it was unthinkable for her. Wilen contacted Ardin and Ardin contacted a mutual colleague of her and Assange, the co-ordinator of the Swedish WikiLeaks group at that time, Donald Boström, asking Boström to persuade Assange to take an STD test, but Assange refused to do so, even after being told that Wilen would go to the police if he didn't. Ardin and Wilen went to the police on August 20, thinking they would merely force Assange to take an STD test, but instead, police told them they couldn't simply tell him to do that, and the statements had to be given to the prosecutor.

The second account confirms that police interviewed Assange and set him free afterward; however, he left Sweden in late September and never returned to attend another interview that'd been scheduled with the prosecutor on October 14 out of fear his arrest could ultimately lead to a US extradition, leading the Swedish police to issue an international arrest warrant for him on November 20. Assange turned

himself in to the British police on December 8 and attended his first Swedish extradition hearing, being remanded in custody. At the second hearing on December 16, Assange was granted bail by the High Court and released after his supporters paid £240,000 in cash and sureties. A further hearing on February 24, 2011, ruled that Assange should be extradited to Sweden, and it seems like he must've appealed that decision a couple of times, since the High Court upheld it on November 2, 2011, and so did the Supreme Court on May 30, 2012.

Asylum

Still being a native Australian citizen at the time, Assange naturally sought the help of the Australian government, but a letter from Australia's Attorney-General, Nicola Roxon, clarified that his country wouldn't seek to involve itself in any international exchanges regarding his future,^[6] basically leaving Assange to fend for himself. Assange decided to seek Asylum from Ecuador instead, and on June 19, 2012, the Ecuadorian foreign minister, Ricardo Patiño, announced that Assange had applied for political asylum, that the Ecuadorian government was considering the request, and that Assange was staying at the Ecuadorian embassy in London.^[7] The UK Government then sent a letter claiming they had the legal right to raid the embassy, based on one of their laws, but Patiño said that'd violate the Vienna convention.^[8] Ecuador officially granted Assange asylum on August 16,^[9] with President Rafael Correa saying the next day that Assange could stay at the embassy indefinitely.^[10]

Swedish chief prosecutor, Marianne Ny, sent an email to the English Crown Prosecution Service on October 18, 2013, informing them that she intended to lift the detention order and withdraw the European arrest warrant, but the CPS tried to dissuade her from doing so.^[11] On February 5, 2016, the United Nations' Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that Assange had been subject to arbitrary detention by the UK and Swedish Governments since December 7, 2010, including his time in prison, on conditional bail and in the Ecuadorian embassy, saying Assange should be allowed to walk free and be given compensation,^[12] but the UK government rejected the claim.^[13] On May 19, 2017, prosecutor Ny officially revoked Assange's arrest warrant, adding that they could still resume the investigation if he visited Sweden before August 2020,^[14] but Assange announced he'd stay in the embassy anyway since the UK government still wanted him for breaching bail.^[15]

Arrest

Now, this is where things start to get more interesting. Lenín Moreno, formerly Rafael Correa's Vice President, became President of Ecuador on May 24, 2017. It's also worth noting that in February 2018, Assange brought two legal actions, arguing that Britain should drop its arrest warrant for him since it had become useless, but in both cases, Senior District Judge Emma Arbuthnot ruled the arrest warrant should remain in place.^{[16][17]} Remember her name.

US Vice president Mike Pence visited Moreno on June 27, 2018.^[18] We can make an educated guess

what they discussed since Moreno started saying he wanted Assange out of the embassy the very next month,^[19] and rules seem to have become more strict for Assange not too long afterward, since he filed a lawsuit over them, which an Ecuador judge dismissed in October.^[20] Two US House Representatives also practically threatened Moreno to give up Assange on October 16.^[21] There's 0 chance this was a coincidence since the US Justice Department accidentally revealed on November 15 that they'd secretly issued a sealed indictment for Assange,^[22] which was later found to have been returned earlier that year on March 6, just two days before the statute of limitations on that charge expired.^[23] Moreno's final straw appears to have been the INA Papers, which he believes Assange had a hand in leaking since they sparked a congressional corruption probe into Moreno after they were released on February 19, 2019.^[24]

I'll give some quick info on Manning since they briefly re-enter the story around this time. Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison for their part in the leaks, announcing they'd start being referred to as Chelsea Manning the next day, serving that time until President Obama commuted Manning's sentence and released them on May 17, 2017.^[25] The US District Court issued a subpoena for Manning on January 22, 2019, which asked them to appear in court on February 5 – later moved to March 5 – to testify against Assange,^[26] but Manning refused to do so, landing them in jail for contempt of court on March 8.^[27] Manning was released on May 9 due to the grand jury's term expiring, but

immediately received another subpoena demanding their testimony to a new grand jury on May 16.^[28] Manning again refused to testify and was subsequently ordered back to jail that same day,^[29] being incarcerated until March 12, 2020, having attempted suicide the day before.^[30]

Now, onto the arrest that landed Assange back in British custody. UK authorities were allowed to enter the Ecuadorian embassy to arrest Assange on April 11, 2019,^[31] almost certainly in connection with an IMF loan, aside from US pressure and a personal vendetta on Moreno's part.^[32] The judge quickly found Assange guilty the same day of breaching Britain's *Bail Act of 1976*,^[33] and authorities immediately rearrested him for a US extradition request,^[34] the indictment for which was officially unsealed the same day as well, the charge being Conspiracy to Commit Computer Intrusion, alleging that Assange conspired with Manning to attempt to crack a government computer password.^[35] Sweden also reopened Assange's rape case following his arrest.^[36] On May 1, 2019, Assange was sentenced to 50 weeks at HM Prison Belmarsh for breaching bail,^[37] with the judge saying he'd only have to do half of that with good behavior.^[38]

US Extradition Hearings

Assange's first US extradition hearing was held the very next day, on May 2.^[39] On May 23, the US government indicted Assange for 17 new charges related to the *Espionage Act*, being: Conspiracy To Obtain and Disclose National Defense Information, seven counts of Obtaining National Defense Information, and nine counts of Disclo-

sure of National Defense Information,^[40] bringing his total number of charges to 18.^[41] At least two US news outlets acknowledged that Assange's publication of the leaks was virtually indistinguishable from what other journalists have done across the world, including the US of course,^{[42][43]} and it's noteworthy that this is the first time the US Justice Department's used the *Espionage Act* to charge a third party with publishing classified information, not just the government leaker for providing it.^[44] Despite this clear violation of journalistic freedom, the UK's then Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, signed the US extradition order on June 12.^[45]

Now for a real shocker. Emma Arbuthnot – the same judge who, after Assange's Swedish arrest warrant was dropped, ruled twice that his British arrest warrant should remain in place – initially presided over Assange's extradition hearings but stepped down sometime in late 2019 after his lawyer argued that Arbuthnot had a glaring conflict of interest and should recuse herself since her husband, James Arbuthnot, was personally impacted by WikiLeaks^[46] and is heavily connected to groups that have a vested interest in Assange's extradition.^[47] Vanessa Baraitser was then appointed as the new presiding judge, but Arbuthnot remained the supervising legal figure "responsible for... supporting and guiding" Baraitser.^[48] Baraitser announced on September 3 that she wouldn't

allow Assange to be released after his prison term for breaching bail ended on September 22 since she believed he would abscond again.^[49] One more critical update from 2019: Sweden dropped Assange's rape investigation again on November 19, since the evidence by then had weakened too much.^[50]

Allow me to clarify: Assange completed his prison term for breaching bail on September 22, and the rape investigation for which bail had been granted in the first place was dropped on November 19, so since then, Assange has solely been incarcerated for a US extradition request, the indictment for which has 18 charges, 17 of those being for obtaining and publishing classified information – acts which are standard practice for journalists. Assange's final charge of Conspiracy to Commit Computer Intrusion for allegedly conspiring with Manning to crack a government computer password not only didn't happen, but also: 1) it couldn't have happened, since Manning only gave Assange a portion of the password hash and it literally would've been impossible for him to crack the password without the rest, and 2) it didn't need to happen, since Manning had already sent Assange all of the leaks besides the State Department cables, which Manning already had full access to without the password.^[51] For the cherry on top: extradition for political offenses is illegal due to a US-UK treaty.^[52]

On January 4, Judge Vanessa Baraitser, despite her 96% extradition rate, refused to extradite Assange.^[53] She did so, however, solely on the grounds that in the brutal conditions of an American maximum security prison Assange might commit suicide. Otherwise she accepted the arguments of the prosecution. The US is expected to appeal the decision. So Assange might still get a life sentence for exposing US war crimes – journalism if such a thing exists. Some have called on Trump, who recently pardoned four war criminals,^[54] to pardon Assange as well.^[55] His fate still hangs in the balance.

Conclusion

Assange's indictment is an attack on freedom of the press. If he's convicted, the US Justice Department will have the green light to incarcerate any journalist they feel steps too far out of line. If you see a journalist, political pundit, or politician who claims to understand this case – especially one that claims to be a "progressive," or any form of socialist, communist, or anarchist – and they aren't explicitly calling for Assange's freedom: they're a grifter. There's no way around this. A journalist is being indicted for journalism. There's no nuance to this situation. US Intelligence may not have gone through with plans to murder Assange,^[56] but his conviction could easily murder investigative journalism itself. ☹

U.S. Politics: What to Expect from Biden and Harris

BY STEPHEN SHENFIELD

In the words of Biden himself, “nothing will fundamentally change.”

What can we reasonably expect from the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris?

An assessment of the likely policy orientation of the new administration should take into account the appointments that Joe Biden makes to cabinet posts, the record of his political career and that of Kamala Harris, the sources of finance for their campaign, and – last but not least – the political and economic circumstances in which the Biden White House will have to operate.

All the appointees whom Biden has named so far come from the corporate establishment (see the Editorial for examples).

The long political careers of Biden and Harris tell us a great deal about their attitudes and their patterns of behavior. Biden has under his belt 38 years as a senator plus two terms as Obama’s vice president. Harris has had four years as a senator; before that she was District Attorney of San Francisco for seven years and Attorney General of California for six.



Photo by Rom Matibag on Unsplash

A useful account of Biden’s career is provided by Branko Marcetic, a staff writer for *Jacobin* magazine, in his book *Yesterday’s Man: The Case Against Joe Biden* (Verso and Maple Press, 2020). In the November 2020 issue of *Jacobin* the same writer analyses the financing of this year’s presidential election campaigns. Another exposé is that written and published by Chris Aclixia under the self-explanatory title *The Biden/Harris Ticket Is The Ultimate in Plutocracy: Screw The Little Guy*.

Biden the compromiser

Two points bear special emphasis. First, Biden has always been a great believer in bipartisanship and consensus. The leitmotif of his recent victory speech, for which he received fulsome praise from the corporate media, was his commitment to national unity and ‘healing’ after the divisiveness of the Trump presidency. Unity presupposes compromise. Biden’s compromises, however, are always with the Republicans to his right. And as the latter are much less willing than he to make concessions, ‘compromiser’ generally turns out to be a euphemism for surrender.

Marcetic sums up the sorry result as follows:

‘Biden has spent his career reflexively adopting his right-wing opponents’ position as his own... He has repeatedly worked with Republicans to advance [many of] their political goals, dismantling the legacy of the New Deal in the process... Biden has got swept up in every right-wing panic of the last few decades – crime, drugs, terrorism — often going even further than Republicans in his response’ (p. 6).

This brings us to the second point. Both Biden and Harris have made major contributions to the explosion over recent decades in the size of the prison population – a phenomenon that has led many observers to call the present-day United States a ‘carceral state.’ As district and state attorney in California, Harris was keen to get even non-violent petty offenders locked

up and reluctant to agree to their early release, which she opposed on the grounds that they were an important source of cheap labor for the state. But when her subordinates urged her to prosecute a crooked businessman she refused. Later he made a generous donation to her campaign fund.

Who paid the piper?

Now let's follow the money. Who pays the piper calls the tune. Trump *versus* Biden was the most expensive election ever held. The combined spending of the candidates is estimated at \$14 billion – over twice the amount spent in the 2016 presidential election.

Many companies gave money to both candidates. Especially firms in the military-industrial complex. They certainly had no reason to be displeased with Trump, but they wanted to hedge their bets.

Mining corporations and the fossil fuel industries (oil, gas, coal) supported Trump. The high-tech firms in Silicon Valley supported Biden.

The financial sector – 'Wall Street' – backed Biden, as it had backed Obama and Hillary Clinton. The medical industry gave to Biden, presumably because he has always firmly opposed national

healthcare schemes like 'Medicare for All.' Show business supported Biden, as did lobbying and law firms.

Overall, more billionaires gave money to Biden (150) than to Trump (108). Most small business owners supported Trump.

Circumstances

In the American political system, the executive branch governs not alone but in collaboration and conflict with Congress and the judiciary. The Democrats are set to retain their control over the House of Representatives, but the Senate hangs in the balance. Which party controls the Senate always has a palpable impact on the effectiveness of a presidential administration.

Whatever happens to the Senate, the Biden administration will be burdened with a conservative Supreme Court that is likely to rule radical new legislation (if there is any) unconstitutional.

We must also take into consideration budgetary and other economic constraints – some flowing directly from the current situation, others imposed by the general requirements of the capitalist system.

Thus one change that does seem

likely to occur as a result of this election is the adoption of serious measures at the federal level to bring the Covid-19 pandemic under control. However, similar measures already taken in states with Democratic governors have proven costly enough to jeopardize other state-funded services. The same problem will now arise in the federal government. Even if taxes on the wealthy are restored to pre-Trump levels, it is hard to imagine a fiscal situation less conducive to maintaining – let alone expanding – social provision.

Policy implications

What are the implications of all this for the policies the Biden administration is likely to pursue?

We can expect some reforms, if only for the sake of appearance, but hardly any with real substance. For example, the United States will probably rejoin the Paris Agreement on climate change, but there will be no Green New Deal (or at least nothing worthy of such a grand name). In the field of healthcare there may be an attempt to revive Obamacare – nothing more.

Those radicals who seek to 'push Biden to the left' under current circumstances have set themselves a truly Herculean task. ☹

How I Became a Socialist

BY STEPHEN SHENFIELD

Comrade Shenfield shares how he became a member of our sister party, the SPGB

I had a vague idea of socialism even as a young child. About the age of five or six I became aware of money. I remember thinking that it seemed a needlessly complicated and roundabout way to do things. I must have had some idea of a simpler and more direct alternative, but I can't be specific. I can't reliably distinguish the idea I had at that age from the conception that I found a decade later in the literature of the SPGB. What I can say is that when I read about socialism in that literature I had a feeling of *déjà vu*.

As I grew a bit older I became aware also of the inequality arising from the different amounts of money that people had and how it harmed human relationships. My father, a GP (general practitioner) in the British National Health Service (NHS), was still the junior partner in a group practice. My mother especially felt that he was unfairly treated, as he did more work than the senior partners but received a considerably smaller share of the net income of the practice. I learned that some of the families we knew were better off than us while others were worse off. Both situations caused discomfort and resentment.



Two incidents stand out in this regard. Once we were invited to a wedding by distant cousins whom I shall call Sam and Rita. They were the wealthiest of our acquaintances. Afterward our gift to the newlyweds was returned to us. They drove up, left the gift on our garden wall, and drove off without a word. Evidently they felt insulted that our gift was not of greater value. No one, apparently, had ever told them that 'it's the thought that counts.' My parents were upset. I asked my mother to explain what had happened. She replied that Sam was a 'businessman.' That was a new word for me. I did not know what it meant, though clearly it was something nasty. We stopped visiting them. Later, however, Rita

started coming by to see my mother and cry on her shoulder because Sam was beating her. Clearly being a businessman was something very nasty indeed.

The other incident occurred when I was 10, on a school outing to see the ships at Portsmouth Harbor. We had brought sandwiches to eat on the train. My mother had made fantastic sandwiches for me. This embarrassed me more than anything, because the other kids had much worse sandwiches. When the other three boys in the train compartment saw my sandwiches they asked me to share them. I thought this was fair and we pooled our sandwiches. As we were eating them a teacher looked

in on us and told off the other boys. He thought that I must have been intimidated into sharing my sandwiches, whereas in fact I had done so willingly.

The misery that goes with poverty was one of the themes in the family stories told to my sister and myself. There was, for instance, the tragic tale of our maternal grandfather Harry, who had been raised from an early age by his father to earn a living as a violinist. He was one of the musicians who played in cinemas as accompaniment to the old silent films. During the depression the 'talkies' replaced the silent films. Suddenly all these cinema musicians lost their livelihood. Some money could still be earned by playing at weddings and the like, but it wasn't enough to support a family. My grandfather had been a sensitive and caring man, but he went to pieces and became abusive. My grandmother eventually had enough. She changed the keys and locked him out. He took to sleeping on underground trains. One morning, when all passengers were instructed to get out at the end of the line, he stayed behind. He was dead.

Then there were our mother's evacuation stories. Like other kids from London's East End, she was packed onto a train and sent off to the countryside when bombing began. She was just 11 at the time and had two younger brothers with her for whom their mother was holding her responsible. They were placed with families belonging to all the social classes of rural England, from the gentry, who set them to work as servants, to the very poor, who feared the 'vacees' as creatures from an alien world.

Our mother often drew a contrast between our father and his brother Alan. Their mother was determined to bring them up to be doctors and thereby overcome past poverty and gain respect. They both became GPs. But there the likeness ended. Alan transformed himself into a prosperous member of the upper middle class (to use the terminology of the notorious British class system). This was reflected not only in the outer suburb of London where he had his practice (Harrow) but also in his accent and in the background of the woman he chose to marry. Our father did not want to transform himself. His practice was in the inner working-class suburbs (one surgery in Islington and another in Finsbury Park, near where my maternal grandmother lived). He wanted to help the working class. No doubt was left in our minds concerning which brother had made the morally superior choice. Nevertheless, Alan had great personal charm and I still liked him.

But which class did we actually belong to? After all, helping the working class and belonging to the working class were not one and the same thing. When I was three we moved out of our cramped quarters over my father's surgery to a new semi-detached home in the suburb of Muswell Hill. Didn't that, taken together with my father's profession, make us members of the middle class? It was very confusing.

I was proud of my father for his commitment to equality. He was a member of the Socialist Medical Association (SMA) and I recall his support for an SMA campaign for a more equal distribution of the funds allocated by the government

for paying NHS staff. He wanted GPs and senior hospital physicians to get less so that nurses and junior doctors could get more. The British Medical Association made fun of the SMA: who had ever heard before of a trade union demanding that their members be paid less?

I developed a hostility to competition as well as to inequality. This hostility first arose at school in the context of football (soccer). Before a game the captains would take turns choosing members for their teams. I was always one of those chosen last – often, indeed, the last of all. The other boys who found themselves in this invidious position adopted a pose of not caring; after all, they said, sports were stupid. A case of sour grapes, perhaps? I, however, did care. Not that I wanted to play for a team. I wanted to kick a ball around, just for fun and without keeping score. Sometimes, when the other boys were playing football in the playground, I would join in their game uninvited; if I got hold of the ball I would kick it in whatever direction I fancied. For some inexplicable reason this annoyed them. One day they got so annoyed that I was physically ejected and ended up in tears and with my glasses broken. After that I gave up.

As I mentioned, I grew up deeply confused about my identity – class identity, gender identity, and also national or ethnic identity. I was born in London, but my forebears on both sides of the family had come from various parts of the Jewish Pale of Settlement in the old Russian Empire. At school I was acquiring a love of English poetry; at the same time my paternal grandmother, whom my mother

described as Russian, was teaching me to love Russian poetry too. We were also Jewish, whatever that meant. So was I English? Or British, with a connection to Wales and Scotland as well as England? Or Russian perhaps? Or Jewish, if that was an ethnic or national marker rather than just a religion? Or a combination of the above? It was extremely confusing.

Our parents, though themselves half-hearted about religion, decided that my sister and I should have a Jewish education. For some years I attended *cheder* (religious class) twice a week and went to the synagogue for Saturday morning service. I especially enjoyed the singing and the rabbi's sermons. Curiously enough, the rabbi and the *cheder* teachers were adherents of a Jewish version of what later came to be known as 'liberation theology' and strengthened my rebellious inclinations. 'You are not Jews,' the rabbi would tell his congregation. 'Jews worship God. You worship Mammon' (but privately he assured our family that such accusations did not apply to us). We were taught to emulate the prophets in denouncing hypocrisy and injustice and defying those with wealth and authority. And no need for tact: were the prophets tactful?

My father had been a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain for a few months in his youth. He left not as a result of any political disagreement but in order to concentrate fully on his profession. He remained loyal to the Soviet Union: I recall an unpleasant argument with him in 1968 over the invasion of Czechoslovakia. (Well, all arguments with my father were

unpleasant; he didn't know how to argue in a pleasant manner; did I?) Several of my parents' close friends were members of the CPGB. They had special respect for Simon Temple, principal of a local school and Communist Party candidate in numerous elections. My mother always agreed to help out at the annual 'jumble sale' (bring-and-buy) for the CPGB newspaper *The Daily Worker* (later renamed *The Morning Star*). Once I asked her why she stayed on the fringe of the Communist Party but had never joined. She explained that she liked and respected her Communist Party friends but terrible things had happened in Russia and she could never join them in supporting the system that existed there.

When I was about ten our parents went by themselves on two 'special' trips, leaving me and my sister with an aunt. One of these trips was to Israel, the other to the Soviet Union. They were 'special' because taken for the purpose of considering emigration. In both cases the decision was negative and we stayed in England. My parents, and especially my mother, had managed to see through the official propaganda façade, at least to some extent, and perceive some of the unsavory reality concealed beyond it. When I asked her how she had liked Israel she flabbergasted me by calling it a fascist country (this, mind you, was before the Six Day War of 1967 and the occupation that followed it). Overcoming my initial shock, I asked her why. She had hated the militaristic atmosphere and observed a similarity between Nazi and Israeli youth movements. Having digested this, I asked why we still had the JNF box on the shelf (to collect

coins for the Jewish National Fund). Her reply was to deposit the box where it belonged — in the rubbish bin. [I have told the story of our family's rebellion against Zionism in more detail here.^[1]]

When I was about 14 I started a serious search for some political party or group to join. Taking my mother's stance as my starting point, I looked for an organization that opposed both the unjust and irrational society around us and the system that existed in Russia. It seemed to me for a while that the Trotskyists might fit the bill. But it was hard to make sense of their literature, which consisted of two contrasting types: (1) 'theoretical' journals filled with almost impenetrable jargon; and (2) propaganda sheets that just repeated and expanded upon a few simple slogans and demands. Later I was to realize that the split in Trotskyist – and, more broadly, Leninist – literature reflects the new class division in their theory and practice between 'vanguard' and 'masses.'

I was looking for something 'in between' these two types of literature – 'middle-brow' writing that I could understand but that did not insult my intelligence. One day, while I was browsing in a left-wing bookstore, an issue of *The Socialist Standard*, journal of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, happened to catch my eye. I quickly realized that this was the sort of stuff I had been looking for. I wrote away for more literature and when the package of journals and pamphlets arrived I stayed up until 3 am reading them. Almost everything rang true. I wrote back and was invited to meet the late Jack Bradley of the local SPGB branch, which held

Winter, 2021

weekly meetings at the Muswell Hill Library. Jack was to become a sort of mentor for me. Before long I was interviewed by the branch and admitted to the SPGB. I was 16.

Of course, it was not only the clear style of the SPGB's literature that attracted me. There was much in the ideas themselves that strongly appealed to me. The descriptions

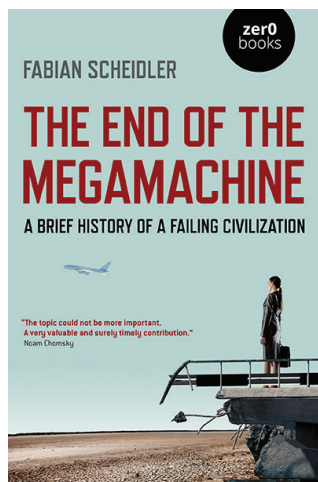
of socialist society resonated with the vague notions of my early childhood. The ideas also helped resolve my confusion about identity – both 'class' identity, through the broadly inclusive definition of 'working class,' and 'ethnic' identity, through the consistent opposition to nationalism or so-called 'national liberation' and the emphasis on the unity of the human race.

It was only after joining the SPGB that I learned from my mother that an uncle of mine had also been in the SPGB. That was during the time when the famed orator Tony Turner was active. However, that was not a factor in my joining the SPGB. My uncle had never mentioned it to me. ☺

Muswell Hill Library / Photo by Philafrenzy on Wikimedia Commons



Reviews



The End of the Megamachine: A Brief History of a Failing Civilization

by Fabian Scheidler

This is a remarkable work – an original interpretation of global social evolution, written in a style accessible to a broad readership. Each concept is carefully explained as it arises. Scheidler's skill as a communicator no doubt owes much to his experience in diverse media – theater, opera, and television as well as print (he is a co-founder of the independent newscast Kontext TV). His latest book can be recommended wholeheartedly even to people who are allergic to theory.

The approach is broadly Marxian, but free of the quasi-religious compulsion continually to refer to Marx and justify any deviation from his views. The author never misses an opportunity to debunk a conventional myth. For example, the historical record contains no instance of money ever evolving spontaneously out of barter, as postulated in economics textbooks. On the contrary, the introduction of money has always been closely connected

World Socialist

with the rise of state power.

Scheidler draws a contrast not only between class and classless societies but also between class societies that do and do not possess an expansionary dynamic. Expansionary societies, such as the Roman Empire (but not ancient China) and the 'megamachine' of modern capitalism, have been the most predatory in exploiting natural resources and human labor. They have also had the most devastating wars. As the Caledonian (Scottish) tribal leader Calgacus said of the Romans in 85 CE, 'they make a desert and call it peace.' Conversely, Europe's feudal 'Dark Ages' were not such a bad time for ordinary people, compared to what came before and what came after. Slavery was no longer common; state power was weak and localized; wars were waged on a small scale.

Part I of the book focuses on pre-modern social development. One pervasive theme is the crucial role played by metallurgy in the formation both of military power (weapons and armor) and of markets (metal coinage). Part 2 traces the stages in the rise of the 'megamachine': emergence of the machine-like state and the modern world-system; coal power as a supplement to metallurgy; conquest first of Europe and then the world through 'total market' and 'total war,' with its destructive impact on the Americas, Africa, and much of Asia.

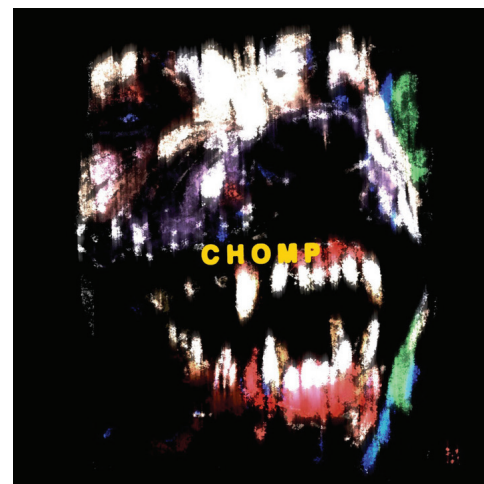
In the modern era, the expansionary dynamic assumes its final form of the accumulation of money for its own sake. In recent decades, however, this accumulation has started to come up against its

ultimate limit – the ecology of the planet itself.

The last chapter discusses how the megamachine can be obstructed and brought to a halt. The author emphasizes local and regional action – and it is indeed at these levels that efforts to block accumulation have so far been undertaken, sometimes with at least temporary success. Socialists, however, question whether a global system can be overcome fully and decisively without a certain amount of coordination at higher levels, up to and including that of the world as a whole.

In an Afterword to the English edition, Scheidler reflects on the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

-SS



(My) Song of the Season Stockholm Syndrome

by Russ ft. KXNG Crooked

I'm pretty sure I first heard about Russ sometime in 2016. My homegirl Xmvndx went to one of his concerts that year and got to do a meet and greet with him, so she recorded a video of her singing for him. We were both at a show

not too long after, I can't remember if it was one I set up or where we were exactly – I want to say On-3TrackMind – but she showed me the video. I obviously didn't think much of it since I'd never heard of him, but I could tell he must've been a pretty big deal since his concert was at a major venue and she was stanning pretty hard.

Around a month later I came across his track 'What They Want' somehow and thought that was dope enough to check out more. 'Losing Control' didn't do it for me, but I loved the indie braggadocio of 'Do It Myself.' His VladTV interview dropped about a month or two after and that also made me a fan of him as a person because of how honest he was and the fact that he didn't care who he pissed off in the process. He's had a handful of polarizing moments since then, but he's consistently been dropping bangers along the way, and his latest offering's no exception.

As soon as I saw the features on Russ's latest EP CHOMP, I knew this was gonna be nonstop bars. Ab-Soul, Busta Rhymes, Benny The Butcher, and Black Thought are all spitters and I've never heard anybody get on a beat produced by DJ Premier, The Alchemist, or 9th Wonder and not bring their A-game. The other four tracks were decent – I get the feeling he either put this together pretty quickly or these were throwaways from his next album – but 'Stockholm Syndrome' stood out by far; I'm honestly surprised he didn't drop a video for this one. He flexes on the self-produced beat in true Russ fashion, throwing in some fire quotables and flow switches for good measure and KXNG Crooked also

makes sure not to disappoint.

This was a great track to end off the year with, but keep your eyes on him, because – knowing Russ – I'm positive he's got even more heat lined up for 2021.

-JORDAN LEVI



This Is Neoliberalism by BarakalypseNow

This Youtube documentary covers some of the prominent economists and writers behind the rise of our current economic orthodoxy, being neoliberalism. "Fish are the last to discover water," as they say, so I think this development is very important for radicals of every stripe to understand in order to recognize it's "common sense" arguments as soon as they're deployed and get an idea of how astroturf movements like this could develop in the future. The documentary's split into five parts and clocks in at just over three hours long altogether, but I'm sure there'll be more parts added over time since part five still doesn't fully get into the roles played in its ascendance by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher or their successors, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair.

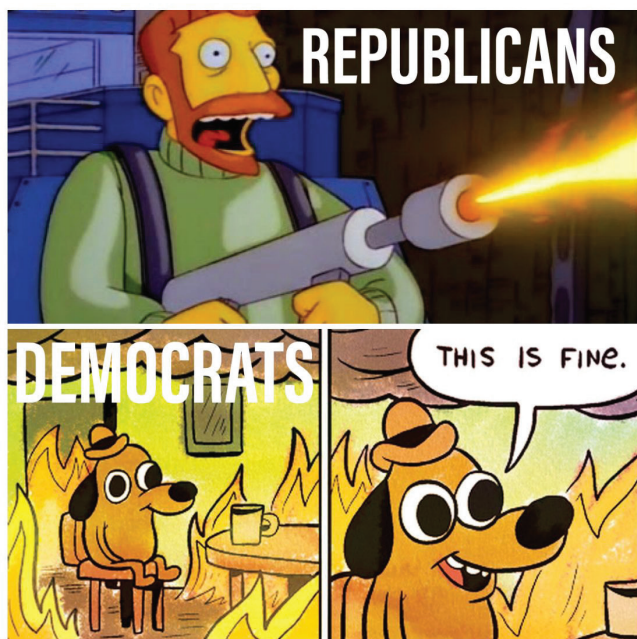
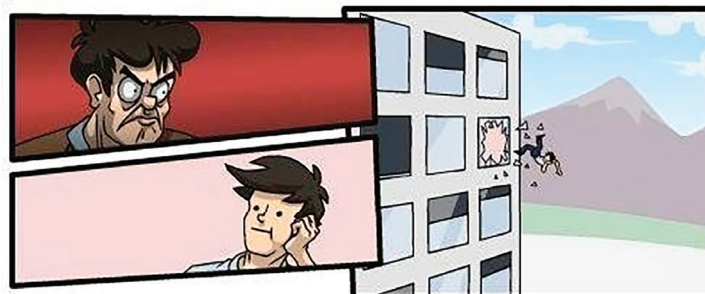
The documentary mainly focuses on: the period following World War I; the stock market crash of 1929 and subsequent Great Depression; the economic reforms of FDR and

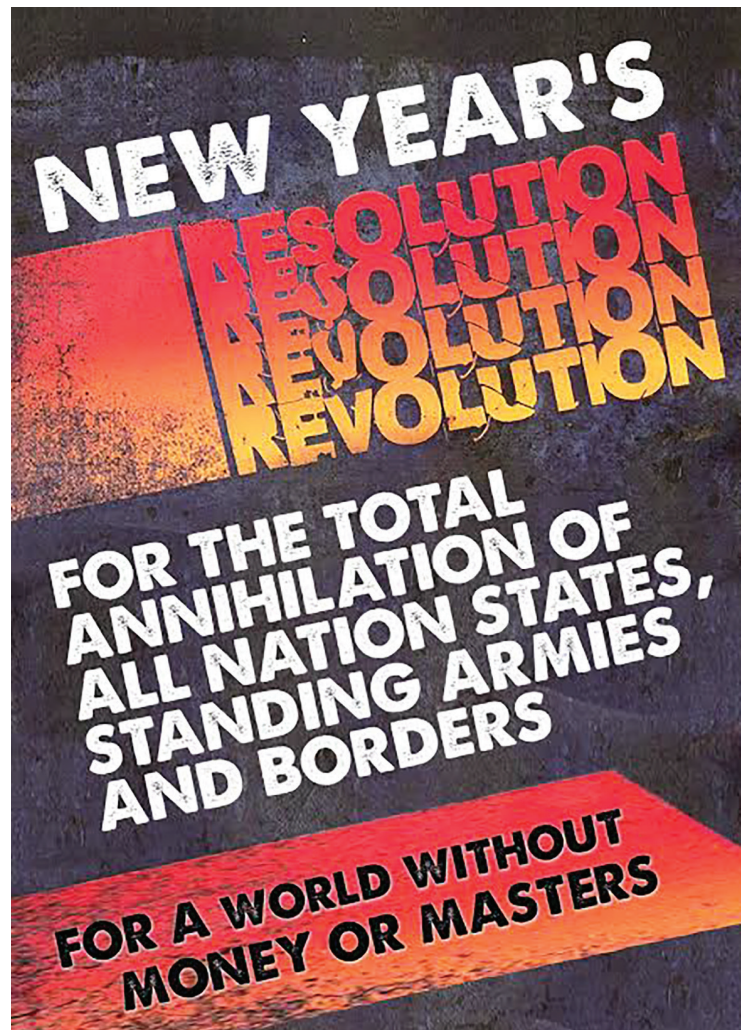
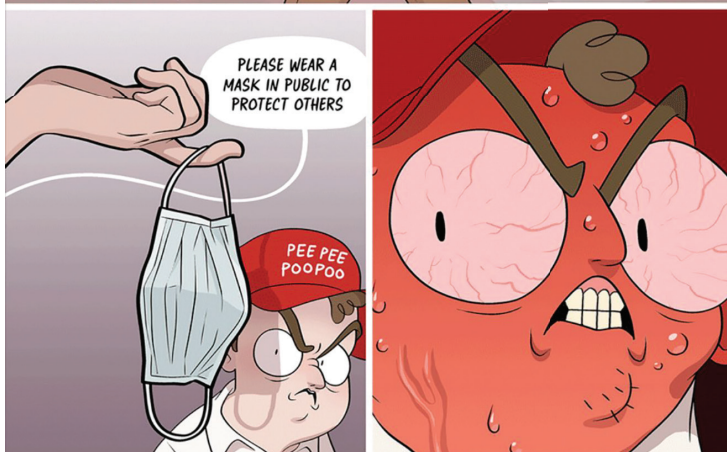
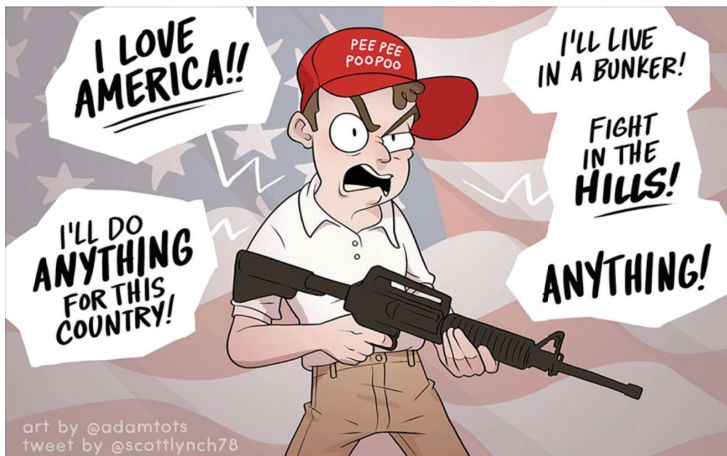
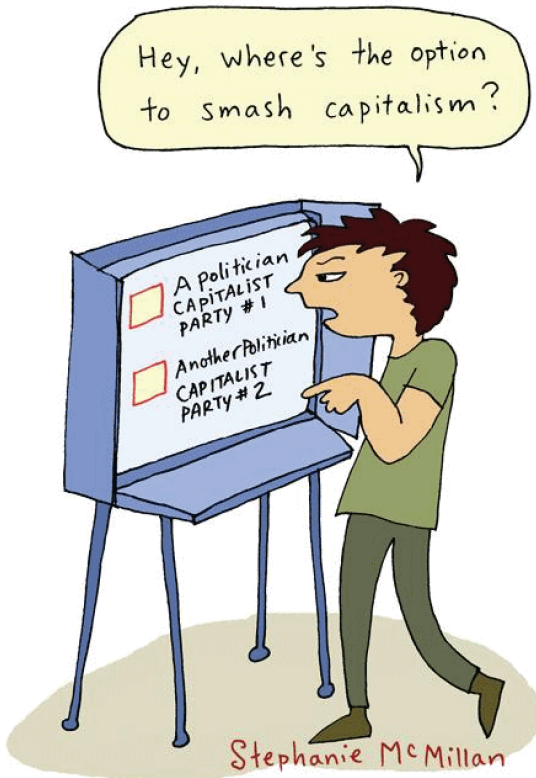
Clement Attlee; World War II; and the stagflation of the 1970's. Most people know there were around 3 decades of unprecedented prosperity immediately following WWII, but I don't usually hear it mentioned that this was brought about by a very different economic paradigm which preceded our era, called Keynesianism. This era was heavily influenced by the work of John Maynard Keynes and marked by a focus on government intervention, as opposed to the individualism and free markets of the classical liberal era immediately preceding it. As the theories of Keynesian economics came into question in the 70's, defenders of classical liberalism – such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman – simultaneously grew to prominence, along with their associated organizations.

These economists first got to test their ideas, with disastrous results, in Chile, after the military coup of Augusto Pinochet. Even so, the conservative parties of the US and the UK fully embraced the framework of neoliberalism in the 80's, and even the liberal parties did so in the 90's, leaving little in the way of this new economic consensus of deregulation and austerity. With inequality and tensions reaching a boiling point following the 2008 recession, mass protests such as the Occupy movement may later be seen as some of the first death throes signaling the end of neoliberalism's reign. I'm excited to see how they cover its development in the last four decades following the 70's, but everyone should definitely check out what they've got so far in the meantime.

-JORDAN LEVI

Funnies





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Flashback



(*Socialist Standard*, January 2009)

Who will make up the Obama administration is at the time of writing speculation, though we do know his Chief of Staff is Israeli army veteran Rahm Emanuel, popularly viewed as Likudist hawk and that his National Security Adviser will

Contacts

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be architect of the Mujahedeen Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Not only is Obama incapable of ushering in significant change, bar a few miserly reforms, but neither is there anyone he can bring to his administration capable of bringing the change that was so promised in his election campaign for no other reason that changers do not get confirmed by the Senate. There exist quite influential interest groups – the AIPAC, the military security complex, Wall Street etc to hinder the advancement of such undesirables.

The hope many have in Obama to implement policies that will benefit the class that matters is misplaced. His political rawness means he will be manipulated by more experienced advisers, little different from the neo-cons, maybe even key fig-

ures from the Bush administration, and pressured by a corporate elite who funded his victory to execute policies that fit in with their own agenda.

The outcome of US elections carries one truth: namely that whichever candidate becomes president, he has but one remit once in office – to further the interests of the US corporate elite. It's just not a feasible option for any newly elected president to entertain any idea other than guaranteeing a safe playing field for the domestic profit machine and doing what's needed to try to ensure the US maintains its global hegemonic status.

<https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/2000s/2009/no-1253-january-2009/obama-no-real-change/>

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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.

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Black Wednesday

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https://youtu.be/3Ag_4AqEanY?t=68

#FreeAssange

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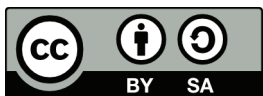
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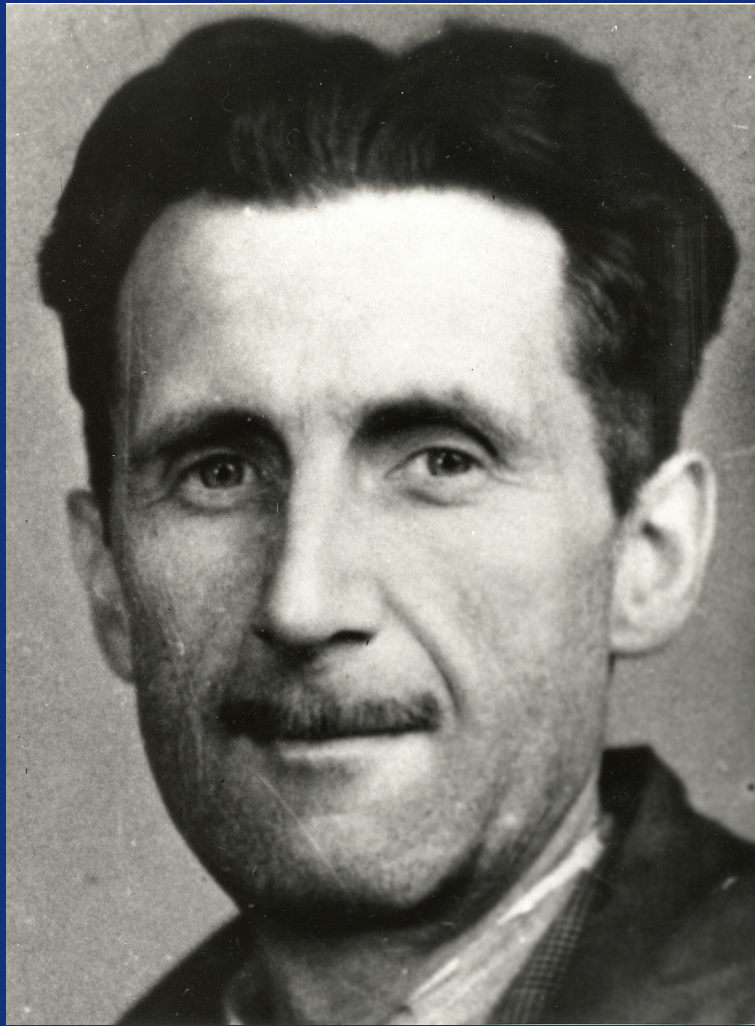
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Thanks for reading!



“The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them.” -George Orwell