

f future

NURSES AND TEACHERS HIT BY PAY CUTS

New Labour is forcing millions of teachers and NHS staff to take a wage cut so that Tony Blair's government can keep to Tory spending plans. Despite all the rhetoric about education and the health service, the government is ensuring that poorly-paid staff will continue to quit schools and hospitals.

Teachers, nurses and doctors were due to get a pay rise of 3.8% in April. But the government has ruled that they will only get 2% - with the rest coming in December.

With official inflation running at over 3.6% a year, it means that the April increase will not even be enough to compensate for the rise in prices over the last 12 months and amounts to a reduction in wages.

BY THE EDITOR

Unions already concerned that the minimum wage will be well under £4 an hour and hedged with restrictions, reacted angrily to New Labour's attack on the low paid.

Malcolm Wing, spokesperson for the public sector union Unison's 250,000 nurses, said: "Britain's nurses will be angry and disappointed that the new government has failed to deliver a decent deal for the profession."

He likened it to a "windfall tax" on nurses' pay, adding: "Staging the award will mean that a staff nurse will have around £5 taken from her purse every week for the next eight months so that the Chancellor can stick to the previous

government's spending limits."

Doug McAvoy, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said the deal would cost teachers £50 a month, and accused the Labour government of "betrayal".

David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "The government can kiss goodbye to recruiting good honours graduates into teaching."

Meanwhile, Tory spending limits have not stopped Prime Minister Blair and other ministers spending millions of pounds since coming to office on doing up their homes and offices, and taking their partners on expenses-paid trips abroad.

Millions who voted New Labour in the hope of a change now know where the government's priorities lie. ■

Inside this issue: South Korean workers prepare to fight for their rights ■ Senior figures in the arts attack New Labour's cuts ■ 150 years on **The Communist Manifesto** holds its own ■ The new global pick-and-mix religion ■ *Opinion* A new approach to drugs is needed ■ England's art treasures

Korean workers resist lay-offs

The South Korean Parliament is rushing through new laws allowing for mass lay-offs and the erosion of employment rights. The plan to undermine workers' rights has the backing of the International Monetary Fund, as part of its \$57 billion bail-out of South Korean capitalism.

The government plans to abolish the Labour Standard Act, which sets out minimum employment standards, and to permit the setting up of job agencies, expanding the use of temporary and contract workers.

The "chaebols" – the giant conglomerates which dominate South Korea's economy – want to go much further. They want the right to sack people at will, to impose terms and conditions and to cut wages. They also want public sector workers banned from joining unions or striking.

There have been a series of bankruptcies amongst the chaebol group – eight in 1997. The total bank debt of the chaebol groups amounts to 20.5 trillion Korean won. The crisis of the chaebol has led to a chain reaction of bankruptcies among small-to-medium enterprises and a wave of illegal lay-offs and wage cuts.



South Korean workers prepare for action

A statement from the Korean trade unions says the conglomerates are attempting to transfer the responsibility and burden of the current crisis to the working people:

"The resistance of Korean workers to this kind of potential outcome was manifest in the 1997 general strike. It is uncertain, on the other hand, whether the Korean system has the 'capacity' to suppress workers' reaction."

IMF rescue packages to a number of South East Asian countries will bring similar attacks on workers' rights. Loans agreed so far are: South Korea \$57bn; Thailand \$17bn; Indonesia \$20bn.

More than a trillion US dollars in wealth disappeared as the various currencies plunged. Now the US is flexing its military

muscles in the area to enforce the austerity packages which are a condition of the loans.

President Clinton has personally telephoned both President Suharto of Indonesia and South Korean President Kim Young Sam warning them to sign up. In the case of Kim Young Sam, Clinton gave him just two days to accept the harsh terms. There are 37,000 American troops in South Korea.

Martin Khor, head of the Third World Network in Malaysia, says the IMF is little more than an instrument to soften up Asian economies for US domination: "What the rich countries couldn't do through bilateral or multilateral pressure they are now extracting by using IMF loans as leverage." ■

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"No" to war against Iraq

War is the continuation of politics by other means, a 19th century Prussian military strategist said. The US-British plan for sustained bombing and missile attacks on Iraq fits this description perfectly.

Behind the crude propaganda of Clinton and Blair we must search out the real truth of what amounts to a unilateral declaration of war against Iraq.

Firstly, the war plans are not about making the world safe from "evil dictators" like Saddam Hussein, or ridding the world of chemical and biological weapons which are under the control of a "madman".

Weapons of mass destruction are held by a number of countries. But we are supposed to believe that these are "safe" in the hands of "decent (non-Arab) people" like the American military, who defoliated large parts of Vietnam, the Zionist fanatic Benjamin Netanyahu or the drunken Bonaparte of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, whose army razed Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, to the ground.

The racist language used against Iraq's dictatorship also conveniently ignores the fact that Washington and London armed Saddam in the first place and turned a blind eye when he used chemical weapons against his own people.

Washington and London know that bombing will not change

the political situation in Iraq. In fact, the Iraqi people, whatever their thoughts about the Saddam regime, rightly see the US-British threat as the greater danger.

The warmongering is a crude attempt to demonstrate that imperialist interests – principally the supply of oil – are not threatened by Iraq or anyone else. It is a signal that no one is supposed to challenge the power of global capitalism, wherever it operates.

The American military also needs a war – to justify vast public spending and to test out a new generation of "smart" bombs and missiles which they will then sell to the rest of the world.

All this because Iraq objects to weapons' inspectors crawling all over its country while the United Nations – a fig-leaf for American interests – holds the country's people to ransom with punitive sanctions which have led to the deaths of many Iraqi people, including children.

Whatever we think about the Iraqi dictatorship, socialists are obliged to defend the country and its people from military aggression by imperialist powers. The Iraqi people have the right to determine their own affairs, free from outside interference.

Paul Feldman, Editor

"Save socialism from the dogma of the past"



The crisis of the Yeltsin regime could lead to an extreme right-wing dictatorship, Russian journalist and author Yevgeny Pashentsev told a packed meeting at London University. He was in London to launch his 498-page book, *The Left Parties of Russia*.

Pashentsev, who has written extensively on social history and contemporary issues, spoke about the extreme poverty that most Russians endure, whether workers or professors. Russia's economy was essentially controlled by various Mafia groups, he insisted, with Yeltsin as the nominal head of state.

The danger of civil war was apparent to all, Pashentsev told the meeting. As Russia was a nuclear power, there was a clear danger to the rest of the world. Mass poverty combined with an Russian nationalism could provide the basis for a fascist movement to take a grip on society.

Pashentsev said the left movements suffered from a lack of theoretical understanding. Some groups like the Communist Party of the Russian Federation wanted to return to the discredited Brezhnev period of bureaucratic rule. Their leader, Gennady Zyuganov, was a nationalist who had nothing to offer the young generation.

Pashentsev said it was vital to offer a new socialist perspective free from the dogmas of the past.

Project for a new party – gaining more support

Disillusionment with New Labour is widespread, and *Socialist Future's* call for the formation of a new party is gaining support. On this page we publish some more responses to the idea. Why not have your say – send your views for publication in the next issue to: *Socialist Future*, PO Box 942, London SW1V 2AR or email: sfg@sfuture.demon.co.uk

Support free education

I think a new party is a very good idea. I like the idea of free education and training as I will be a college student next year, so I support the campaign.

A.C., East London

Keep the word "socialist"

I think there is a great danger in removing the word "socialist" from the political vocabulary.

G.M., South-West London

Back organic farming

The priorities should be: support for organic farming; good quality of life, work and air for all; cheap, good quality housing; the acceptance and legitimation of different household/family/work patterns; a reduction in road traffic and the allotment of large country estates to people who want to work the land.

S.B., Bromley

There is no democracy

Labour's policy leans towards and is dictated by the market economy, less towards the individual. Social security laws can contradict an individual's decision. For

example, benefits are cut if employment is turned down. This is not democracy.

E.D., East London

Broken promises

The government is not fulfilling its promises, such as better welfare for the population. Building a new party will be hard, taking into account all the classes that exist in society and the opposition we will have.

R.G., Barnet

New party must capture peoples' ideals

I feel New Labour has totally betrayed the high hopes of those who voted for a new government last May. They haven't lived up to what the people who elected them were hoping for. Instead we have the same old Tory policies. The Tory spending cuts have been stuck to, instead of New Labour producing their own budget with their own ideas. The welfare cuts were not what people were expecting from a Labour government. It is pathetic to watch the backtracking they do whenever something doesn't go their way, just to look good in the public eye. They seem

Socialist Future is sponsoring a project for launching a new party in 1998. The need for an alternative to New Labour has become more urgent as disillusionment with the government's policies increases rapidly. To start a discussion about what kind of party is needed, the December issue of *Socialist Future* put forward a number of basic principles upon which such a party would be founded.

- a commitment to socialist principles and the historical achievements of workers and revolutionaries in every country
- a commitment to lead a struggle for power as the only way to end capitalism
- a constitution that places obligations, as well as conferring democratic rights, on its members
- an understanding that Marxism as a living theory to guide political action is central to the party's work
- a leadership that is decisive, responsive and prepared to develop policies as situations change
- a united front with all those inside and outside the Labour Party who come into conflict with the Blair government
- an agreement that building a new socialist International is the way forward to meet the challenge of global capitalism
- a party programme that appeals to working people, which is based on their having control of economic, social and political life, freeing resources and technology from the profit frenzy.

to be only concerned with their image, but there is no substance behind the image.

The campaign for a new party is a very good idea, as there is a real need for it. There is no party of the left at the moment. What does exist is not of any great significance. The new party must capture the ideals that people have. It must try and tap into them. It must not dwell on single issues. It must examine the whole world situation, every aspect of what is going on at the moment,

instead of picking on individual points. It must not be negative or fight a negative campaign. It needs to use socialist ideas to re-analyse and re-apply them to the new financial situation in the world to show how wrong it is and how it can be changed. A new party must realise that the old ideas won't work anymore and that things have moved on too much. It cannot be isolated and must develop links with other groups all over the world.

T.H., London University.



Housing promises broken

Homelessness is set to go on rising because New Labour has abandoned pre-election pledges to help young people. Philip Wade reports

Housing is one of the areas in which New Labour likes to appear “caring and sharing” and distinct from the Tories. Publicity stunts on run-down estates would have us believe that this is the party of the homeless and socially excluded.

But what has actually happened so far in housing is rather different. Whether by neglect or design, Labour in office has continued the work of the Tories.

Take the last government’s attack on homeless people. Every year councils are granted cash on the basis of a calculation of housing need in their area. Three years ago in a particularly vicious move, the Tories decided that the calculation should ignore the number of homeless people in an area and set about phasing out homelessness as a criteria for assessing peoples’ need for housing.

This year was the third and final year in which the homeless criteria was to be removed, so Labour had plenty of time to reverse the change, or at least put it on hold. But nothing was done and as result councils like Croydon and Hillingdon, with a large proportion of homeless people, have suffered a 70% reduction in their allocation for housing over the last three years.

When in opposition Labour’s housing spokesperson Nick Raynsford had attacked the move. He is now a junior minister under Housing Minister Hilary Armstrong and is supposed to advise her on housing policy. Raynsford is no radical, but he is well respected for his detailed knowledge of the housing sector and he

knew what damage phasing out homelessness as criteria would cause. This is probably why civil servants have kept him busy with piles of documents on his other area of responsibility, the new London assembly.

Housing benefit for the under 25s is another example where Labour said one thing in opposition but it has done another in power.

When the Tories introduced the idea of cutting back benefit entitlement to the cost of a shared room, Labour in opposition was outraged. The move has meant that hundreds of landlords have refused to house those on benefits, forcing young people into even more squalid conditions, as was predicted. Labour first promised to scrap the cut, then in the election run-up it said it would review it. Meanwhile more and more and young people are forced to sleep on their friends’ floors or worse, because their benefit entitlement will not cover the cost of the accommodation available.

Ministers have stopped the extension of the single room restriction to claimants under 60 – they argued that it would cause untold damage. But the message for under-25s is that it is too late to reverse the cut. And why? Because it was part of the last government’s sacred spending plans.

Sticking to the Tory’s spending plans seems to be one of the only things that Labour believes in. And now it has gone further by introducing its own Tory spending plans.

On the funding for housing associations Labour has not just stuck to the last

government’s plans but has gone a step beyond.

It has cut the proportion of grant payable to associations by 2%, forcing them to rely still more on the cash of private lenders. This was only a year after the Tories had cut the grant by the same amount.

At that time Labour in opposition rightly pointed that such a cut would “force additional increases in rents and result in more housing association tenants being forced into benefit dependency”. But Labour did exactly same thing a year later.

Housing association rents have soared over the last 10 years because of falling grants and borrowing from private lenders. They already trap thousands in poverty. Many tenants cannot afford to take work because that would mean the loss of housing benefit which pays for huge rents.

A cut in the grant rate will only force up rents further, because it increases housing associations’ reliance on borrowed cash which has to be paid for in rent. So how can Labour be serious about getting people from welfare to work if it is failing to help housing associations cut rents?

The way the housing benefit system works simply deepens the poverty trap. But Labour is now scared to tackle it, because it might frighten off lenders. Housing benefit is now seen less as subsidy for people’s housing costs than as a means of levering in private money.

As with its plans to restrict the minimum wage, and its concessions to tobacco sponsorship, New Labour’s housing policies are driven by the interests of big business. ■

No room for the arts in Labour's New Britain

While New Labour seeks to "rebrand" Britain, artistic achievement is neglected and destroyed.

BY A SOCIALIST FUTURE REPORTING TEAM

Before last May's election, New Labour painted a glowing picture of how it planned to raise educational standards and make culture available to all, regardless of income.

Mark Fisher, now New Labour's Arts Minister, stated last June, just after the election: "We do not want anybody to be charged entry to national museums and galleries." He promised to try to end entrance charges by the year 2000.

But by November he had already made a complete U-turn. He told museum directors that they should not end charges and that they should learn from Marks & Spencer, Tesco and Harvey Nicholls how to raise money. He said museums should see how they could earn more "per visitor per square metre".

It is not only the museums and public collections who have been given a rude shock. The attitude of the government is arousing alarm and anger right across the spectrum of visual arts, ballet, theatre, film and music.

Culture Secretary Chris Smith has announced savage cuts in the Arts Council grant of £1.5m. In real terms its annual subsidy has fallen by £42m over six years. The arts will lose £50m a year by the year 2001. The British Museum and the Tate Gallery have been told to make cuts. The British Film Institute has lost £1m. The National Heritage Memorial Fund has been cut back from £12m a few years ago to £2m a year now.

For those under the illusion that New Labour's attack on the Royal Opera in December would mean more money and support for supposedly "popular" forms of



"I'm a Labour man, but I'm a very worried Labour man. The talent celebrated here today is worth keeping."

Sir Peter Hall

art, the truth is rather less charming. Instead of making art and culture more available to more people the present cuts will restrict access to the arts and make it more elitist.

The retiring chairman of the Arts Council, Lord Gowrie, said: "The funded arts are in the worst revenue crisis of my adult lifetime."

He added that the latest cuts were "a signal that basically they don't want this sector. To have given us a standstill grant instead of a cut would have been such a tiny amount compared to the £350 billion budget for public expenditure."

The government has appointed two businessmen to take charge of the top posts in the arts.

Sir Colin Southgate, the boss of the EMI music company, is now chairman of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden while Gerry Robinson of Granada will head the Arts Council.

Neither is particularly known for their cultural credentials. Sir Colin is the son of a fruit and veg trader who made EMI into a company with global ambitions. He was short listed to run the National Westminster Bank.

He has said about the opera: "I don't want to sit next to somebody in a singlet, a pair of shorts and a smelly pair of trainers."

Robinson, who now heads the most biggest cultural quango, made his fortune through business coups, and by floating his contract services company, Compass, and finally by running Granada. One business rival has called him a "Visigoth" (the Visigoths were a northern tribe of barbarians who sacked Ancient Rome).

New Labour's choice shows its real priorities: an attempt to continue its love affair with big business, especially the nouveau riche who made their fortunes under the last years of the Tory government.

Perhaps less reported has been the fact that Education Minister David Blunkett has decided that art, music and sport will no longer be key subjects in primary schools. The outcry from a number of Britain's leading creative artists and those involved in preserving the country's cultural heritage has not simply been the usual grumble. This is because New Labour's policies do not simply represent just another round of cuts.

Not only Gowrie, but many others across the spectrum of the arts, have tried to point out the *fundamental* destruction of culture and education which is involved.

Here are some of the reactions:

One of the most outspoken is director **Sir Peter Hall**. He received a standing ovation from many of the country's top performers and writers when he made a fierce attack on the government. Chris Smith and Gerry Robinson were attending an awards ceremony at which Hall said: "A cut in the Arts Council grant. Why? It saves tuppence. It's going to ruin a number of small theatres and dance companies. What is the point, Minister? Is it to assure Tory voters that you won't be soft on the arts? It won't do. I am a Labour man, but I'm a very worried Labour man today. The talent that has been celebrated here today is worth keeping."

Shortly before Hall's speech, it was announced that the Greenwich Theatre would have to close due to a £200,000 cut in grant. Only one and a half miles away is the site for the Millennium Dome which is costing £750,000m, paid for by the government and the National Lottery.

Sir Simon Rattle, director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra wrote in *The Observer* (Sunday, 1 February) "If music is not part of the core curriculum – and does not have to meet required targets – then some schools will choose to take arts teaching seriously, and some will not..."

"Even the minimum entitlement under the curriculum is just a dream for many schools, as the teachers valiantly struggle with the lack of resources fatally coupled with overwork."

He added: "Learning is not as compartmentalised as a class-room timetable, and all subjects have a bearing on each other. When one is past the basics, creativity and imagination are going to be the most vital tools for our children. Arts education shifts the emphasis from observing to doing, and the learning is in the doing."

Sir Philip Dowson, the president of the Royal Academy (which receives no government funding), in opening an exhibition of work from Britain's regional museums, criticised the government's attitude:

"The present government insists on its



"We are witnessing the abandonment of the principle of free admission... threatening access for the many and not the few."

Peter Jenkinson

priority of education, education, education. These are fine aims but they are in danger of being misinterpreted. It is more than reading, writing and the Internet. Culture is indivisible.

"The great importance and significance of the regional museums and galleries' educational role has been terribly neglected by governments and as a result the museums' inability to keep their collections up-to-date and nurture the arts presents a crisis."

Most regional museums, despite their unique collections and public role, do not even have sufficient funds to conserve the treasures handed down to them. One local museum director has an annual acquisition budget of £89, far less than the cost of lunch for two at the New Labour's favourite River Cafe.

At the same event, **Peter Jenkinson, director of Walsall Museum and Art Gallery** and the pioneering New Art Gallery for Walsall Project, pointed to the generous legacy of former generations in contrast to "mean-spirited 1990s, when everything has a price".

Supporting government statements on increasing access to the arts, he said, "We also witness the abandonment by the same

government of the centuries-old principle of free admission to the core collections of our national, and by implication regional and local, galleries threatening access for the many and not the few."

"We also witness," he added, "the abandonment by David Blunkett of art as a key subject in our primary schools, which will have devastating long-term effects."

Just as seriously, New Labour's dogmatic notions about education combined with lack of funding will deny children at state schools the chance to learn about music, art and physical fitness. This in spite of the fact that, as Rattle says, that "all the recent research shows that children exposed to music from an early age develop better language and reading skills and a generally heightened ability to concentrate and therefore to learn".

"School music education has been one of Britain's great glories – people have come from all over the world to observe it."

However such real contributions to culture and education are to be destroyed and substituted with the hazy, but extremely costly, project for the Millennium Dome. **Stephen Bayley**, who recently resigned from his job as chief designer on the Dome, has warned that the ideology behind New Labour's notion of culture, "People's Britain", bears a sinister resemblance to the Nazi use of the word *Volk*. He is not the first to draw this comparison.

New Labour's idea of education and culture for the masses is an enforced regime of "reading, writing and arithmetic at school", with an expensive visit to see pickled cows, sharks and other intriguing delights at the Millennium Dome.

Meanwhile, the cultural achievements, which are inseparable from the broader opportunities struggled for and won by people from poor and working class families over the last century and a half, will be trampled underfoot if the government has its way.

As Rattle says: "Music is for everybody, and like many of the other marvels of humanity, needs to be inculcated as early as possible. This is not some kind of 'high culture' limited to the privileged, but a treasure chest which can and must be made available and accessible to enrich every life." ■

Still a world to win

BY PAUL FELDMAN

The Communist Manifesto, which was first published 150 years ago in February 1848, remains an essential guidebook for any socialist serious about overthrowing capitalism.

This is because Karl Marx, with the help of Frederick Engels, was able to show for the first time the essential features and laws of capitalism as a class-based social system of production and exchange.

Obviously capitalism has changed in form since the mid-19th century, but the essence of the system remains the same: the exploitation of the majority by a minority who own and control the means of production in the pursuit of profit.

From the publication of the Manifesto, the case for socialism was given a scientific basis, moving from a set of ideas about a new society to a theory which had the force of history behind it.

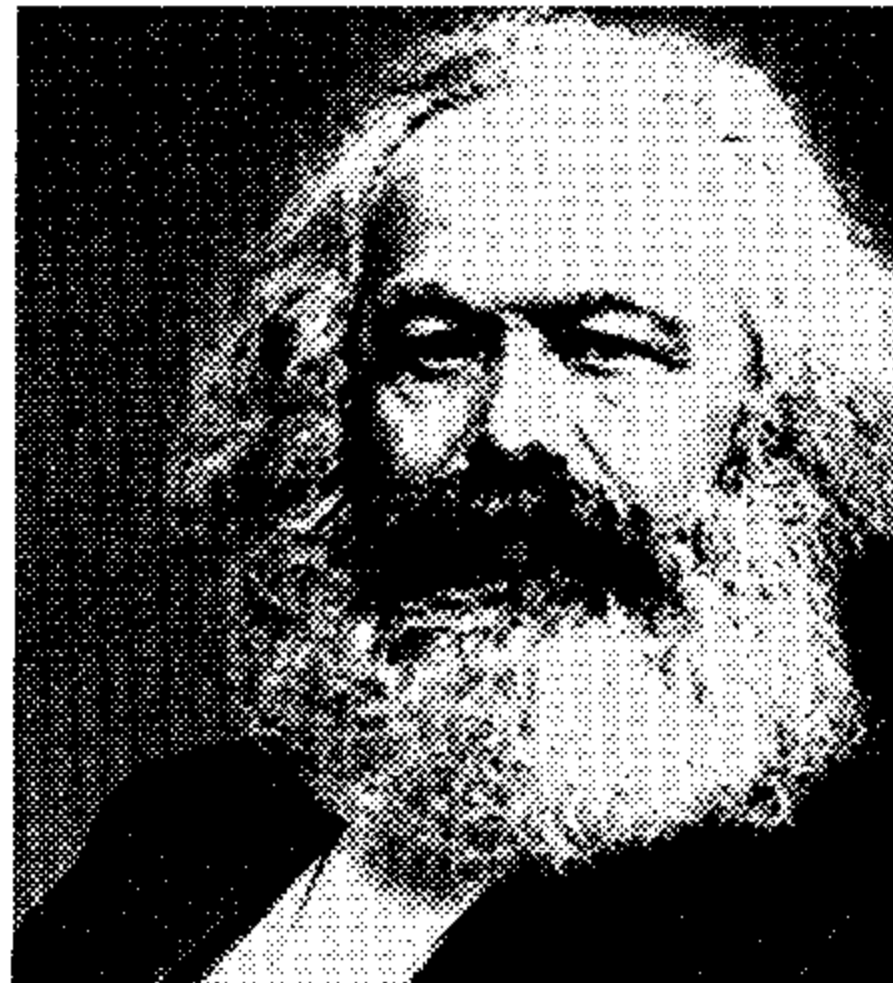
Marx and Engels demonstrated that capitalism was itself a necessary and definite stage of class society, but only a stage. Capitalism, they showed, must give way to socialism – the abolition of classes based on property ownership.

Moreover, capitalism created its own gravedigger in the form of the vast majority – the working class – who were compelled to sell their labour power to the employers, the bourgeoisie.

History had given the emerging capitalist class the task of ending feudalism. In turn, the overthrowing of capitalism, the Manifesto shows, falls to those who had nothing to lose – the working class.

As Marx and Engels explained: “The theories of the communists are not in any way based upon ideas or principles discovered or established by this or that universal reformer.

“They serve merely to express in general terms the concrete circumstances of an actually existing class struggle, of



Karl Marx

any historical movement that is going on under our very eyes.”

Marx’s great genius lay in revealing that the existence of classes was bound up with particular, historic phases in the development of production. He showed that the class struggle necessarily leads to the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, the overthrow of capitalism by the working class.

The principal motive force in history, Marx revealed, is the struggle of humanity against nature to provide food and shelter, which in turn created a social organisation of production. In broad terms, these have been slavery, feudalism and capitalism.

This was the basic foundation upon which developed political and legal systems of state rule, ideology, together with all forms of cultural life and norms of social behaviour. This philosophy developed by Marx and Engels is known as historical materialism.

“Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man’s ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man’s consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?” Marx and Engels write: “What else does the history of ideas prove, than that

intellectual production changes in character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.”

The Communist Manifesto shows how the capitalist class played a revolutionary part in history by ending feudalism and absolute monarchy, establishing a world market and conquering exclusive political control.

It concludes: “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.” The New Labour government forcibly springs to mind here!

After revealing how capitalism had reduced social relations to a “callous cash payment” in the name of the “freedom” of free trade, Marx and Engels explain: “Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.”

This is a description that perfectly fits today’s world, let alone capitalism of 150 years ago. Globalised capitalism, with its constant movement of production, financial instability, job insecurity and rapid technological change, is the new form of what Marx and Engels were writing about.

The Communist Manifesto shows how the contradiction between the forces of production and its system of ownership and control is the historical law that leads to revolutionary change. This is how the capitalist class came to power in countries like England and France, as the rising bourgeoisie were drawn into conflict with the existing organisation of agriculture and manufacturing.

“The feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder.”

Marx adds: "A similar movement is going on before our own eyes. Modern bourgeois society... a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells."

The anarchy of capitalist economy is characterised by the massive application of science and technology, a tremendous growth in the productive forces, the socialisation and internationalisation of production, and the reduction of all labour to property-less wage labour.

In parallel with this, the form of ownership remains private and at the end of the 20th century, concentrated in a handful of global monopolies like Microsoft, Sony, Nike and the biggest corporation in the world that will follow the merger of two giant British drug companies.

As a result, the world economy is dominated by the unconscious and unplanned mechanism of the world market. Humanity does not control the vast productive forces but becomes their victims in crisis and war.

Marx describes this process as the "revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production", leading to "an absurdity – the epidemic of over-production". Society finds itself in a "state of momentary barbarism".

And the reason? Marx elaborates: "The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property.

"The conditions of bourgeois society [private ownership] are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are



Frederick Engels

prevented." The overcoming of this contradiction, this "revolt" of the productive forces against society itself, is the question that confronts us in 1998 as the world plunges into slump, environmental degradation and the threat of war.

History, as we have seen, assigns classes special and specific roles. Capitalist society is the latest and most developed form of class society, of a society based on the exploitation of working men and women – wage-labourers.

The capitalist class took power to *consolidate* its own power which had been established within feudalism; by contrast, workers have to *abolish* their own status as an exploited class in order to take society forward. In this way, the socialist revolution creates a class-less society.

Of course, Marx and Engels did not think that the working class, simply by the conditions of its existence, would become conscious of its historic role and think in terms of modern, scientific socialism.

To grasp the capitalist system as a whole it is necessary to bring together and go beyond all previous achievements in history, philosophy and economics. A party is needed, and the Manifesto explains its role:

"The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the

ultimate general results of the proletarian movement."

Communists, they add later in the Manifesto, "bring to the front, as the leading question in each [revolutionary movement] the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time".

Cynics and sceptics argue that because capitalism still exists 150 years after the publication of the Communist Manifesto, its ideas have been "proved wrong". Such people accept what the Manifesto calls "the selfish misconception" that the social forms of capitalism are "eternal laws of nature and of reason".

Marx and Engels deal at length with those who in the name of socialism actually accept capitalism and merely want to eliminate its worst excesses. This struggle against the influence of reformism in the socialist movement has gone on unabated since 1848.

A break-through was achieved in 1917 when the Bolsheviks led the first workers' revolution in history in Russia, proving in practice the correctness of the Communist Manifesto's analysis of historical progress.

But the eventual isolation of the Russian Revolution, combined with the backwardness of the country, created conditions in which Stalinism through bloody oppression was to triumph over the principles of the world socialist revolution.

Today we live under unique political conditions. Reformism cannot offer even the smallest concessions to workers and has turned into its opposite. Millions in Britain, for example, are experiencing a profound shock from the capitalist New Labour government of Tony Blair.

Stalinism as a political force no longer exists either. The terrible distortion of Marxism, its conversion into a form of state dogma, has lost its grip with the ending of bureaucratic rule in the former Soviet Union.

These changes provide Marxists with a real opportunity to raise the challenge of the overthrow of globalised capitalism, which is hated by the vast majority of humanity. There is no better conclusion than the one which ends the Communist Manifesto: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win." ■

Pick-and-mix religion

Penny Cole looks at the message behind a new book arguing for religion without God

In a world where old beliefs, cultures and values are broken up by the globalisation process, people are often said to be “looking for something to believe in”.

Traditional religion has fallen into disrepute for this purpose, so Cambridge theologian Don Cupitt, has put forward his idea for religion without a God. He rejects the idea of a supernatural God who really lives in heaven. Developments in science have put paid to that, he says, in his book *After God*.

Because God has been shown to have been a subjective human construction, Cupitt condemns the whole universe to the same fate. He is a follower of the 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who said that whilst things may really exist, human beings can never grasp their true nature in thought – only an image of them in the mind.

Cupitt claims that: “We now see that we have to give up the notion that there is a stable, mind-independent world order out there waiting to be described correctly in an equally stable and adequate vocabulary. The most we can ever now hope to reach is some form of pragmatism that has given up the idea of objective truth and is content in every department of life with ways of speaking that work well enough to get by with – for the present.”

Overwhelmed by the loss of his absolute God, Cupitt cannot find a way of synthesizing information into any coherent whole. It is all just parts, formless and purposeless.

Thus we read: “Already reality has become a web of communication, an outpouring, outsideless flux of signs that has caught us up and carried us away with it. It is, and we are with it, foundationless and goalless. It isn’t going anywhere and nor are we. There is such a torrent of little meanings that there can no longer be any great overarching Meaning of it All.”

The best way to refute this subjective philosophy of despair is to look at the way



in which human society, knowledge and thought – including religion – have developed over time, and Cupitt himself writes well about this.

He explains how Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers had to learn about the animals and plants they needed to survive, and then find ways of passing this information on. They systematised their knowledge as the “spirit” of a plant or animal, which captured all its characteristics.

Later animal spirits became the totem whereby the tribe defined itself through the characteristics observed in animals, like bravery, cunning, or beauty. From this we can see that human beings first became self-aware by recognising in themselves the same characteristics as nature expresses in other parts of its kingdom.

As humans settled in cities and nations, the worship of spirits of the natural world gave way to worship of more abstract Gods, symbolising ownership, power and common interest. Each city or state had its own God to define its difference from others.

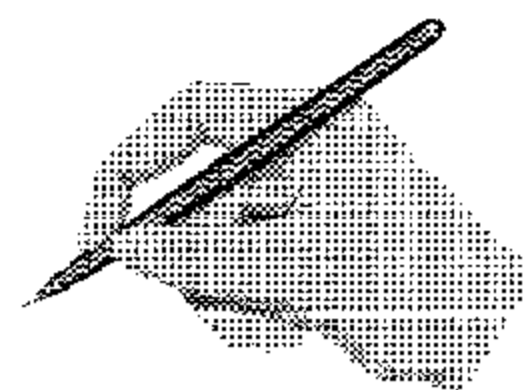
Cupitt describes this process, but sees it solely as a subjective development of linguistic forms and terms. Parts of his own research prove, however, that it was a real material development.

For example, he writes: “Mental life in the Stone Age was modular, meaning that although people had developed considerable skills in certain areas – social interaction, tool making, and natural history being the chief ones – these domains were at first rather distinct; there was no particular biological pressure to synthesize them. But with the transition to the Upper Palaeolithic, *people did begin to synthesize their various cognitive skills in such a way as to form for the first time a more unified mental life, selfhood and world view.*” [my emphasis]

The question arises, therefore, if there was “no particular biological pressure” to develop this more complex synthetic world view, why did it happen? The Marxist view is that it happened because nature has the power of reflection. Human beings are part of nature and subject to it. In order to live, they work, bringing parts of nature under their control. They experience the world through their five senses; nature reflects itself in their consciousness, at first simply and then in a more complex way.

The primitive idea of a “reindeer spirit” which expresses all the characteristics of a reindeer arose because there is a real reindeer reflected in the mind of the hunter. The more reindeer hunted, the more developed the ideal concept of the reindeer became. Later, when language develops, the reindeer and its characteristics are expressed in words.

Nature is complex and interconnected, and as human consciousness develops it increasingly reflects this complexity and interconnectedness, through developing knowledge and technique. Consciousness is relative, but contains an absolute, which is nature, the developing universe of matter in motion.



Throughout the ages people have taken a variety of natural and synthetic drugs to alter natural states of mind, to cure illness, expand consciousness or simply to escape the drudgery of everyday life.

Successive governments have done what they can to curb drug use but with no real success. But how seriously can we take the advice of politicians when the son of the Home Secretary gets caught with possession of a Class B drug?

Whatever Jack Straw's plan to tackle drug use in Britain is, it didn't get as far as succeeding within his own household. The episode also exposed the stupidity of New Labour's policy of making parents responsible for the activities of their offspring.

The effects of some drugs are more pronounced than others, but should we draw such a clear line between one drug and another? A "traditional" drug like alcohol causes a great number of deaths each year and is often a catalyst for violence.

Still, most of the MPs ranting against

drug use in the Commons can be seen knocking the stuff back like it was going out of fashion. At the same time, the new government fell over backwards to allow the tobacco giants to continue with their Formula 1 advertising

The mainstream media drug misinformation service won't hesitate to inform you that illegal drugs involve a far higher risk to users but will very often fail to show sufficient scientific evidence to back up their case.

This is not to say that drugs don't cause severe long-term damage to users but unfortunately government short-sightedness means no thorough research into the effects of illicit drugs is carried out.

In response to media hysteria, drug users will tell you that it is more dangerous to go skiing than to take ecstasy. Or that more people have died from allergic reactions to peanuts than from ecstasy-related deaths.

While there is some truth in this, it is an attempt to deny the dangers of drug taking. There are always some side

effects and there are also people whose bodies will react badly to the ingestion of drugs such as ecstasy.

It is a fact that people will continue to use drugs to achieve an altered state of consciousness for a whole lot of different reasons.

Drug use of all types arises from a variety of social pressures on people. As an industry, it is one of the biggest in Britain and involves loads of corrupt senior police officers, for example.

With life becoming ever more complicated and stressful a new approach is needed if there is to be any change to the drug problem in Britain.

Cracking down on users and criminalising them only pushes people into a corner and into the arms of dealers. We need a policy which takes steps towards reducing the risk from drug taking and which deals with the reasons people feel the need to take drugs in the first place.

Nick Feldman

Cupitt agrees that religion is part of the superstructure of society which changes with the form of economy and social organisation, but of course he does not give up the supernatural altogether. In fact, it is the only thing in the universe whose existence he sets out to prove.

He has developed his own new religion – an eclectic mish-mash of items picked and mixed from various faiths to make him feel better. He replaces the religion of the Gods with the religion of clutching at straws.

There are many such pick-and-mix religions around today – the cult of Diana, the cult of drugs and dance music, the cult of the National Lottery and the football pools. All these beliefs prevent people of all classes from arriving at a materialist understanding of the world they live in. Cupitt's ideas are particularly aimed at middle-class youth affected by the

globalisation process and new technology.

The fact that traditional religion is breaking down is a reflection of the profound crisis of the capitalist system.

What truly comes after God is not Cupitt's supernatural selection, but a revolution in economic relations, creating the conditions for the development a new ideological superstructure. Only by overcoming the old beliefs and developing their active, objective, relationship to nature, can human beings improve their real lives. As Marx wrote in *Capital*: "The religious reflex of the real world can, in any case, only then finally vanish when the practical relations of every-day life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellow men and to Nature." ■

After God by Don Cupitt. Weidenfeld & Nicolson £11.99

"When political memories are growing increasingly short, it is good that the effort has been made to record the life of Gerry Healy, a revolutionary Marxist who had a massive impact on the working class socialist movement, in Britain and internationally."

Ken Livingstone, MP

Gerry Healy:

A revolutionary life

by Corinna Lotz and Paul Feldman
Introduction by Ken Livingstone.
Published by Lupus Books (1994)
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Art treasures for the public

BY CORINNA LOTZ

Some of the best-loved and best known works in England's museums can be discovered and rediscovered in this great anthology organised by the Royal Academy.

The diversity and quality of the 400 sculptures, drawings and paintings offer hours of enjoyment and the pleasure of recognising things that we have perhaps seen before in another context.

The selection ranges from work from the early Renaissance to the present day. English painting is given pride of place: landscape and animal paintings by Gainsborough, Stubbs, Constable and John Crome. Crome's *Norwich River* has a supreme confidence which was connected with the rise of the Norwich Society of Artists in the early 19th century.

The Victorian epoch produced some truly memorable and peculiarly English works of art. Most of them belong to England's provincial galleries, not London. Ford Madox Brown, for example, painted labourers digging up Hampstead High Street, surrounded by a crowd of contemporary ideologues. His desire to express social and political issues is combined with a painterly skill and sometimes even lyricism.

The Old Master drawings on show by themselves would make it worthwhile to go to the Academy. Great artists of the Northern Renaissance such as Albrecht Dürer and Grünewald rub shoulders with their Italian counterparts. Drawings by Van Dyck and Watteau are a sheer delight. One of the most



surprising things is to discover two outstanding Italian Baroque drawings which have been borrowed from the Kent County Council Arts and Libraries collection.

A strong message is being put across by the custodians of England's public treasures. It is no accident that the huge effort to put this show together was made by the Royal Academy which receives no state funding.

The idea of bringing these treasures to London came from the Conference of English National and Regional Museum Directors, who want to put pressure on the government to help the regional collections.

Co-curator Giles Waterfield outlines the historical background, which gave rise to England's public collections in the exhibition catalogue. Waterfield reveals the intimate connection between England's social history and public access to art.

The first public collections founded in the 17th century were usually in universities

where only the privileged could go. The Ashmolean in Oxford was an exception and the upper classes were quite revolted by the country people who crowded in. "High art" was really only for "polite" visitors. It was only during the 19th century that Acts passed by parliament enabled town councils to establish museums

of art and science. A further Act stipulated that such museums be free. There was a lot of worry about admitting the working classes to public museums, especially after the Chartist demonstrations.

The real problem today, Waterfield concludes, "is that local authority, and university galleries and museums are dogged by political uncertainty and financial cuts. Continual cash shortages and incessant restructuring, generally motivated by the need for economy, prevent them from achieving many things of which they are capable and which their public want." ■

Art Treasures of England: The Regional Collections

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Top of page: *The Travelling Companions*, August Leopold Egg, 1862 (Birmingham City Art Gallery). Above: *The Stone Pickers*, Sir George Clausen RA, 1887 (Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)