

the Socialist postbag

Do you have something to say?

Send your news, views and criticism in not more than 150 words to Socialist Postbag, PO Box 24697, London E11 1YD, or phone 020 8988 8771, email: editors@socialistparty.org.uk. We reserve the right to shorten letters. Don't forget to give your name, address and phone number. Confidentiality will be respected if requested.

Tough lives and rough 'justice'

Salford 18 year old Dane Williamson was accused of arson at the Miss Selfridge store in Manchester. Nearly £500,000 of damage was caused at the store, and Dane could have been looking at a life sentence.

Dane had five alibis for his movements at the time of the riots but the judge wasn't listening and he was remanded to a holding prison where he spent nine days. While Dane was in prison his own flat was burnt out and he lost all his possessions. Then suddenly Dane was bailed and all proceedings were dropped, because the police now have someone else.

Dane had a piece of luck here, he could easily have gone to prison for a long time. Luck is something he hasn't had a great deal of. Dane has spent 17 of his 18 years in care, living in children's homes, and foster homes across Manchester, Salford, and Yorkshire. He had studied business courses and had been looking for employment when all this happened. Life for Dane, like for many young people, was already tough enough.

A Salford Socialist Party member

Win your university fees!

If university tuition fees aren't putting off working class and an increasing number of middle class people from going to university I would be very interested to know why the *Metro* free newspaper (owned by fees supporting Associated Newspapers who publish the *Daily Mail*) has just launched a competition for engineering and science students in which the first prize is £9,000 towards university tuition fees!

**Clive Walder
Birmingham Socialist Party**

**Tesco's pound of flesh**

In the riots on Salford Precinct, where we have a Socialist Party stall every week, some shops took a hammering. Cash Generator, Bargain Booze, the Post Office were all still awaiting repair nearly two weeks later. TJ Hughes, due to close at Christmas, was badly damaged by fire and has closed four months early, with the loss of 23 jobs. Tesco Metro came out unscathed - but the staff didn't.

When the rioters hit the precinct the store closed early on police advice, and closed at 4pm the next day too. Now the staff have been told they must make up the hours!

One staff member said: "It is disgusting they expect us to work the hours. It wasn't our fault the store had to close. We were terrified and we could see the riot police outside. We all just wanted to get home to our kids."

Riots or no riots, Tesco will have their pound of flesh off the workers.

Paul Gerrard

Richest country in the world?

Child poverty in America has increased by 18% in the past decade leaving one in five below the poverty line, according to a new study by the Annie E Casey Foundation. That means 15 million children are living in poverty. The reasons for this increase are cited as the recession causing 12% unemployment and home repossessions as people are unable to meet mortgage repayments. The report authors also add that a higher income level of \$43,512 for a family of four should be used to define poverty - twice the rate used by the US government - as "a minimum needed for most families to make ends meet". That would mean that 31 million children, or 42% of the total, live in poverty.

Rob Bishop

**Pat on the back - or is it a knife?**

In the aftermath of the riots we've had visits from David Cameron and Prince Harry (hasn't Salford suffered enough already?).

Cameron of course praised the 'incredible bravery' of local firefighters. Pretty soon bravery might be all they've got - no stations, no tenders, just bravery. Paul Fogerty, branch secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, was prevented from tackling Cameron about cuts to the fire service. "I was allowed onto the station on the understanding that I did not kick off", he said. "Front line firefighters are sick and tired of getting a pat on the back from politicians one minute and then being stabbed in the back".

Gary Palmer

Where's the money gone at Leeds United?

Around 500 Leeds United fans staged a protest during August at Elland Road stadium before marching into the ground where 1,000 called for chairman Ken Bates' resignation. Much anger was directed at Bates for spending £7 million on new executive boxes, pushing Leeds back into the red. These boxes will be out of reach for most working class fans.

When Leeds United was relegated in 2004, ticket prices actually went up, and have increased every year since then! When Leeds pushed for promotion back to the top division in the late 1980s and early 1990s Elland Road was full to capacity.

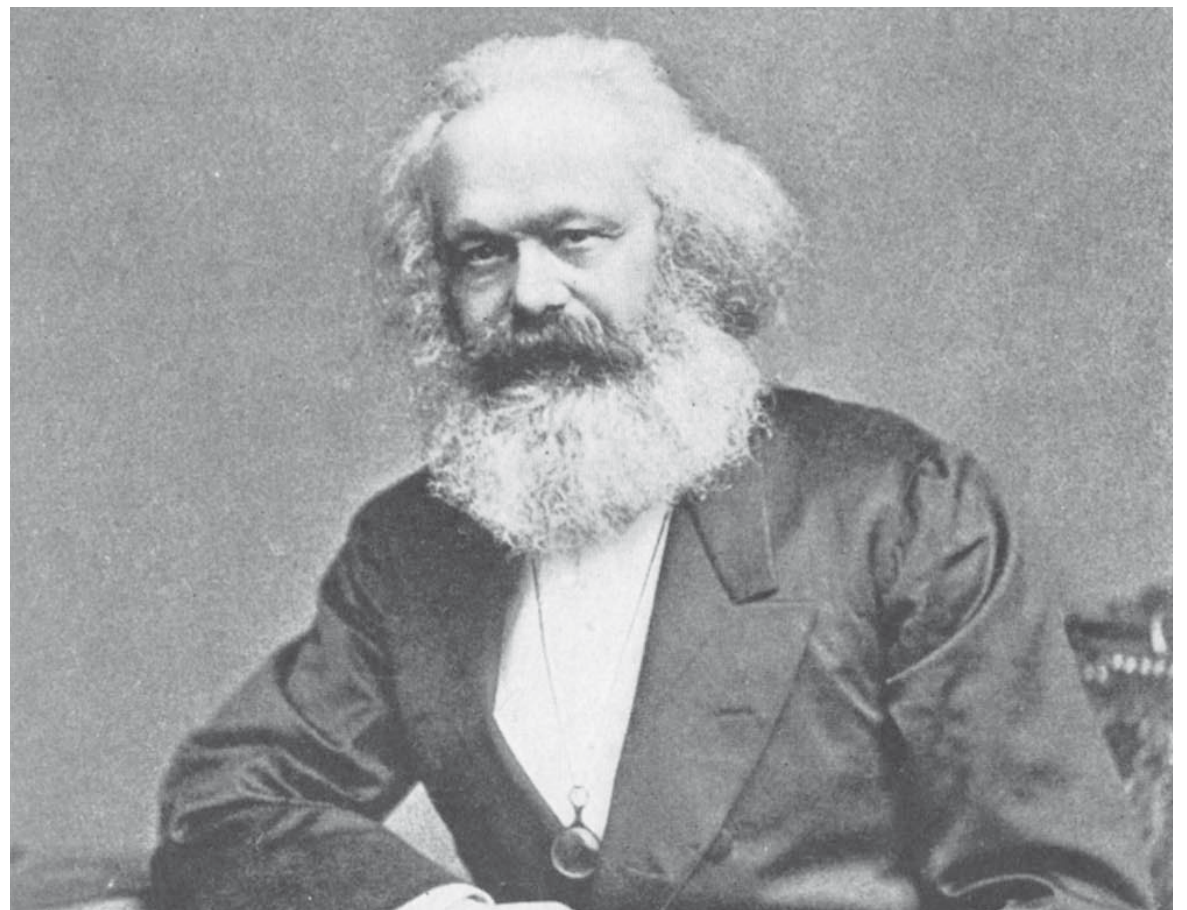
However, while ticket prices are beyond fans' reach and the club lingers in the championship, Elland Road is rarely full. Bates' boxes actually reduced the ground's capacity, meaning fewer fans can watch our club play.

Millions of pounds seem to be disappearing into Bates' business adventures. We demand that Bates opens the books, so fans can see where the money is going ... and why?

Ian Pattison

Book review

Why Marx was right



Karl Marx

Niall Mulholland

"Marxism may be all right in theory ... but in practice the result is terror" ... "determinism" ... "a Utopia" ... "a theory obsessed with class ... advocates violent political action ... and believes in an all powerful state..."

Terry Eagleton rebuts these arguments and other prejudices and myths against Marxism in his new book, *Why Marx was right*.

Starting with today's global economic crisis, Eagleton comments: "You can tell the capitalist system is in trouble when people start taking about capitalism. It indicates that the system has ceased to be as natural as the air we breathe, and can be seen instead as the historically rather recent phenomenon that it is."

Socialists everywhere will be familiar with the accusations that Marxism is a crude form of "historical determinism", reducing everything to the economic, that it goes against human nature etc.

Eagleton, a professor of English literature and cultural theory, answers these arguments with vigour and wit, often alluding to philosophy and literature. His book is sure to reach a readership well beyond academia.

While condemning Stalinism and its legacy, Eagleton also indicts the record of capitalist rule: "Modern capitalist nations are the fruit of a history of slavery, genocide, violence and exploitation every bit as abhorrent as Mao's China or Stalin's Soviet Union..."

Under today's rule of "free market dogma", during the last two decades of the 20th century, the number living on less than two dollars a day increased by one hundred million.

For seasoned Marxist readers, Eagleton's book can act as a 'refresher course' and for those new to the subject it is a useful introduction. It is not without its faults and limits, however. For example, his analysis of the state - under capitalism and the different phenomena of a 'workers' state' - is somewhat unclear.

In his discussions on a future socialist society and its possibilities,

Eagleton correctly rejects Stalinist-style 'blueprints' but is also at pains to avoid appearing utopian himself. He misleadingly asserts that Trotsky, among other Marxists, advocated a "utopian extreme, foreseeing ... a future stocked by heroes and geniuses".

While Eagleton says that "over long periods of time, changes of institution do indeed have profound effects on human attitudes," he weakens and confuses his argument by using the Northern Ireland 'peace process' as a positive example.

He asserts that "changes in sectarian consciousness are likely to be geologically slow..." but "in one sense this is not all that important. What was important was securing a political agreement which could be carefully policed and skilfully evolved, in the context of a general public weariness with thirty years of violence."

The Northern Ireland Assembly does not represent a genuine "political agreement" between working people, let alone a solution. It is a top-down arrangement that institutionalises sectarianism, yet which can agree £40 billion worth of social cuts, exacerbating poverty and sectarian divisions.

A real peace process would see the working class, Catholic and Protestant, coming together in a mass struggle against cuts, sectarianism and the capitalist system, and in the process of overthrowing capitalism, democratically deciding their future in a socialist society.

Eagleton's scope is largely lim-

ited to Marx's basic ideas, vitally important as that is. He does not give enough space to discussing Marx's analysis of capitalism and the reasons for capitalist booms and slumps, which is especially apt today.

He describes the objective conditions for socialism - including how the global working class is far larger than it was in Marx's day - but does not set out ideas about how to get there.

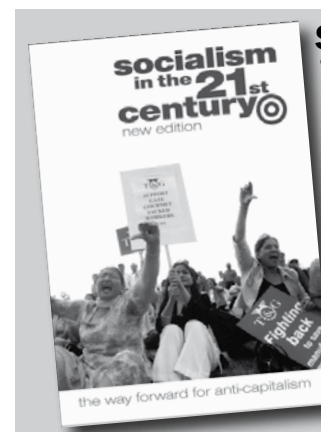
The role of Karl Marx, the tireless revolutionary, who along with Frederick Engels laboured to build a mighty workers' International, is not given thorough treatment.

While sympathetic to the historical record of the Bolsheviks and Lenin and Trotsky, Eagleton does not comment on the validity or otherwise of a revolutionary socialist party today and how to go about changing society.

For a discussion on what policies and programme of action are needed to bring about the overthrow of capitalism and for socialist change - on the basis of the international workers' movement's experiences of over the last 150 years - readers need to look elsewhere.

Not least, in the pages of the *Socialist* (eg. 'What Alternative?' Peter Taaffe, *The Socialist* 26 June 2011) and to Socialist Party publications (eg 'Socialism in the 21st Century' by Hannah Sell).

Why Marx was right by Terry Eagleton, Yale University Press, £16.99



Socialism in the 21st century
The way forward for anti-capitalism
by Hannah Sell

£5 + p&p

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