

Sunday Socialist

INSIDE
105 years since the Russian
Revolution



Bungle in the Jungle

Matt Hancock disgraced himself as Health Secretary with his inept handling of the COVID pandemic which led to tens of thousands of avoidable deaths and exposed the government's inadequate pandemic preparations. Remember the lack of ventilators, Nightingale hospitals with no capacity to staff them, the scramble to acquire PPE, the scandal of turning care homes into death camps to hide the lack of beds in the NHS?

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That should have been the end of Hancock's career. But he only resigned when CCTV footage revealed an affair with an advisor in his office in breach of government restrictions on social distancing.

And now he has done it again, announcing his appearance on "I'm a Celebrity" for a reported fee of £400,000. After initial outrage he said he would give some of it to charity. Now he is going to give it all to dyslexia charities and has revealed that he is dyslexic. Does that make it alright? Certainly not. A disabled man who spent six years as a minister in Tory governments that attacked the disabled and never said a word now wants our sympathy? No way!

He will still draw his MP salary while cavorting in the jungle. What about his constituents? What if there is another pandemic? How are his mates and cronies going to get fast tracked contracts to supply the NHS if he is up to his neck in cockroaches in a bush tucker trial?

This creates a real dilemma for socialists. Should we humiliate Hancock by getting him voted off at the earliest opportunity? Or do we want to prolong his humiliation as the Daily Star suggests, by extending his stay for as long as possible? As a Tory MP he has always talked kangaroo balls. This is a chance to watch him eat his words.

THE NEWS TEAM

NEWS EXTRA: For a few weeks now we have been saying that the UK is in recession, and now the Bank of England has finally caught up. Raising interest rates to 3%, they said that the recession could last for up to 2 years. Remember this is a recession they said would not happen. The only tool they seem to have is a rise in interest rates, thus making lending money more expensive and impacting mortgage repayments and rents. Far from preventing a slide into deeper recession, there is every chance that this will lower business and investor confidence, thus creating higher unemployment. Of course those companies that survive will attempt to drive down wages in order to protect profits and dividends. This recession will be paid for by ordinary people as the rich continue to cream off the profits for themselves. It is now up to workers' organisations to refuse to allow their members to pay the price of the bosses' crisis. Watch this space.

Legal action over Manston Centre



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LEGAL action has been threatened against the Home Secretary Suella Braverman over conditions at the [Manston migrant centre](#), which has come to the forefront of the news after the attempted petrol bomb attack nearby just days ago.

Lawyers on behalf of the charity [Detention Action](#) and a woman held at Manston sent an urgent pre-action letter to the Home Office on Tuesday, the charity said, representing the first action against the Home Secretary for “the unlawful treatment of people held at the facility”.

The pre-action letter, sent by Duncan Lewis solicitors, said the woman “was unlawfully detained by the Home Secretary at the Manston facility in egregiously defective conditions”.

The charity added the complaint also includes “serious threats to the safety of children”.

“We have taken this action out of serious concern for the welfare of thousands of people, including children, still being detained at Manston for periods far beyond legal limits.”

Detention Action deputy director James Wilson

He added: *“We are calling on the Home Secretary to declare that anyone held at Manston for more than 24 hours is being detained unlawfully. We are also asking that the Home Secretary allow access to the facility for organisations qualified to provide support in immigration detention settings.”*

The Home Office confirmed it had received the letter and would be responding in due course, adding that it did not comment on ongoing legal proceedings.

A spokesman for the Home Office did say however that: *“Manston remains resourced and equipped to process migrants securely and we will provide alternative accommodation as soon as possible.”*

Yet we have heard the opposite from witnesses and people who have spent time at the centre. One former ‘resident’ of Manston told the BBC that conditions there were like living in a prison or a zoo. Wishing to remain anonymous, the man said people at the processing centre were treated like “animals” with 130 people forced to share a single large tent, and having to sleep on the floor, being prevented from going to the toilet, taking a shower, or going outside for exercise.

Concerns raised by the woman and the charity about the Manston facility include *“the routine prolongation of detention beyond statutory time limits; failure to adhere to essential safeguarding measures for children; women and children sleeping alongside adult men to whom they are unrelated; inadequate or non-existent access to legal advice for those detained; and exposure to infectious diseases due to overcrowding and poor sanitation”*.

Now read the above paragraph very carefully. Quite apart from the fact they are being detained longer than is legally allowed, and that they have poor sanitation and are exposed to disease, as if that were not enough, but women and children are sleeping alongside adult men.

Those currently screaming about trans women being a risk to women and children because they can use the same bathrooms will of course now condemn this very real risk? Won't they?

Inhumane treatment at migration centre



Image: Marilyn Tyzack for Critical Mass Media Ltd

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THE NEWS TEAM

THE failed terrorist attack on a Home Office migrant centre in Dover last weekend has focused attention on the terrible conditions asylum seekers/migrants are having to endure at the nearby Manston migration centre where hundreds were moved after the attack, adding to the overcrowding.

It also exposed the Home Secretary's pathological hatred of migrants when she addressed the House of Commons on Monday. In normal times after a terrorist attack, you would expect an expression of horror at the act, and sympathy for the victims. Instead Braverman responded by repeating far right talking points that can only increase the likelihood of further attacks.

She said, *"The British people deserve to know who is serious about stopping the invasion of our Southern coast and who is not. Let's stop pretending they are all refugees. The whole country knows that is not true."* She went on to talk about the *"scourge of illegal migration"* and a *"conspiracy"* against her.

And when it comes down to the shocking conditions at the camps Braverman agreed with Conservative MP Lee Anderson when he said *"If the accommodation isn't good enough for them, they can get on a rubber dinghy back to France,"* replying *"My friend is right... Any complaints that the accommodation isn't good enough is frankly indulgent and ungrateful."*

Suella Braverman is under pressure over her treatment of refugees following a report in The Times that she blocked the transfer of asylum seekers from Manston to new hotels and ignored legal advice that the government was illegally detaining people there. Meanwhile, Conservative MP for North Thanet, Sir Roger Gale, has said that overcrowding at the facility is *"wholly unacceptable"*. He refused to point fingers at either Braverman or her predecessor Priti Patel but said someone *"has to be held to account"* and that the conditions were not humane. The chief inspector of borders and immigration, David Neal, said that Manston was wretched and unsafe. The conditions left him *"speechless"*.

The facility, a disused airfield, is only designed to hold 1,000 people but there are currently around 4,000 people being held there. It is a short-term holding facility supposed to house asylum seekers for no longer than 24 hours while they undergo checks before being moved to immigration detention centres or asylum accommodation. But they are being held for weeks and now outbreaks of MRSA and diphtheria have been reported there.

The bacteria was identified in an asylum seeker who was moved out of the site in Ramsgate to a hotel hundreds of miles away before the positive test result was received, which raises concerns about the spread of the infection. The Manston site is believed to now have at least eight confirmed cases of diphtheria, a highly contagious and potentially serious bacterial infection.

Natalie Elphicke, the Tory MP for Dover, says an *"entirely fresh approach"* was needed to tackle asylum seekers arriving on our shores. Her answer is to stop the boats from leaving France. If you were perhaps thinking Labour might do better, it was Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper who said only last week that *"We will work with France to prevent dangerous small boats crossing the Channel and putting lives at risk with a new cross-border police unit to crack down on the criminal gangs who make millions from trading in people and profiting from their lives"*.

Common sense victories offer no hope



[Read online](#)

THE HASTILY called General Election in Denmark saw charismatic prime minister Mette Frederiksen secure the slimmest of majorities as her so-called centre-left Social Democrats won a mandate with the help of their anti-immigrant rhetoric.

As with most systems of proportional representation used throughout Europe, the main winners seem to be smaller right-wing parties. Their success is measured not so much in votes won (though in both Sweden and Italy recently they became the main parties) but in the way the need for their support drives the political agenda to the right.

“The Social Democrats went to the polls to form a broad government. If a majority of parties point to me [as prime minister] I will see whether it can be done. Because that is what is good for Denmark,” Frederiksen said after her Social Democrats secured their best election results in two decades.

No doubt centrist parties across Europe, including the UK’s Labour Party will be studying the recent spate of elections to see what they can learn. But, as [Michael Roberts](#) has commented, *“The general trend of the move to the right by the Social Democrats in all the Nordic countries over the past few decades has led to a gradual and accelerating reduction in the formerly famous social democratic welfare state model.”*

Their success is based on the total abandonment of any commitment to even watered down socialism and an appeal to an anti-immigrant fever whipped up by right-wing parties able to push their racist and anti-poor agendas to a willing audience among careerist politicians for whom principles are as flexible as their allegiance to former allies.

The so-called moderate policies they propose are soft right anti welfare and racist initiatives aimed to camouflage the crisis at the heart of capitalism. Advocating a "zero refugee" policy, the Social Democrat government is working on setting up a centre to house asylum seekers in Rwanda while their applications are processed. Ring any bells?

These elections are following a similar pattern. Parties once considered left-wing are being spooked by small right-wing parties who could eat into their majorities. As a result they adopt more and more policies they previously would have avoided. Their supporters follow them convinced that playing to the ‘centre’ is the only way to maintain their support.

Former right-wing Prime Minister Lokke Rasmussen, now leader of the Moderates, told a rally: *“It’s not red or blue, it’s about common sense.”* What these politicians never do is explain that it is their ‘common sense’ that has led to austerity measures, the biggest cost-of-living crisis in generations and which allows energy companies to get richer and richer whilst ordinary people across Europe approach their radiator thermostats with trepidation.

Relying on common sense has got us into this mess. It will take a radical change in the way we organise society to get us out of it. Blaming immigrants and punishing the poor may satisfy their notion of common sense but ultimately does nothing to solve the deepening crisis of capitalism.

Lula Won but Bolsonaro Won't Admit Defeat



Lula. Photo: Maí Yandara / Mídia NINJA / Flickr / CC BY-NC 2.0 via CounterFire

THE NEWS TEAM

LULA has continued the [Pink Tide](#) in South America by narrowly defeating the far-right incumbent, Bolsonaro, in the Brazilian presidential election. Both Sunak and Biden have congratulated Lula and said they hope to work together with Lula to protect the Amazon Rainforest. So the CIA will not be organising a coup just yet.

Bolsonaro Concedes?

When he spoke on Monday night Bolsonaro refused to [admit defeat](#) or congratulate Lula. Throughout the election he and his supporters have claimed, without any evidence, that there has been a conspiracy between the establishment and the left to rig the election against him.

They were furious with polls that suggested Bolsonaro was trailing and even introduced a bill in parliament to make it a crime to incorrectly forecast an election. These are straightforward Trumpian tactics to create doubt about the result in advance. They have also challenged the use of electronic voting machines which have been in use since 1996 as open to hacking and abuse.

On the day, any abuse came from Bolsonaro supporters in the Federal Transport Police who ignored official instructions and set up illegal roadblocks on highways to stop and delay traffic, including 550 busloads of voters heading for the polls, mostly in Lula supporting areas. In the end all the buses arrived before the ballot closed at 5.00pm on Sunday. But Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, the head of the country's election agency, has ordered an investigation.

ON Wednesday Bolsonaro reportedly told members of the Supreme Court that "it's over" though formally he has still not actually conceded defeat.

Judges back Lula

With judges, the country's election agency, and foreign leaders recognising Lula's victory, many Bolsonaro's supporters have accepted Lula's win. One of the first was Arthur Lira, Brazil's Speaker of the House. He said,

"The will of the majority expressed at the polls should never be challenged."

Crucially, the army has chosen not to intervene, saying that the road blocks were a 'police matter'.

Whether this is the end for Bolsonaro is still to be seen. He is no doubt hoping to emulate Trump by influencing Brazilian politics from the side-lines, stirring up his supporters to obstruct the new government, and maybe cause sufficient chaos and unrest to persuade the army to change its mind.

Revolution Remembered

EDICTORIAL

This weekend marks the 105th anniversary of what the American journalist John Reed described as ‘Ten Days That Shook The World’ as the avowedly Marxist Bolshevik Party swept all before them and changed the course of the twentieth century. This massive event shook our world in so many ways. It hastened the end of World War I and the collapse of imperialism in both Germany and Russia. It turned Russia from an agrarian society into an industrialised one and a world superpower. Most importantly, it inspired socialists around the world and led to revolutionary uprisings across Europe and beyond.

Trotsky was later to write *“During the first two months of 1917 Russia was still a Romanov monarchy. Eight months later the Bolsheviks stood at the helm. They were little known to anybody when the year began, and their leaders were still under indictment for state treason when they came to power. You will not find another such sharp turn in history - especially if you remember that it involves a nation of 150 million people. It is clear that the events of 1917, whatever you think of them, deserve study”*

Leon Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution, 1934

Within days of assuming power the Bolsheviks put the factories in the hands of workers, land in the hands of peasants and the military in the hands of soldiers. They turned the class system on its head, introduced equality legislation guaranteeing the vote to all adults, including women. They tried, in short, to introduce socialism in the least auspicious of circumstances.

But, for now, let us celebrate the Russian Revolution and remember that revolutions do not happen because of revolutionary parties or revolutionary leaders but as a swelling of the masses to whom revolutionary leaders are able to give shape and meaning. The Belgian novelist and revolutionary socialist Victor Serge explains how many of the Bolsheviks on the ground in 1917 were behind the movement not leading it.

“On the very day when the textile workers of Petrograd launched the strikes which less than a month later led to the downfall of absolutism, the Bolshevik Committee of one district of the capital advised against the strike...The revolutionists of every party, who had spent their entire lives preparing for the revolution, did not realise that it was at hand, that the victory had already begun.”

Victor Serge From Lenin to Stalin, 1937.

As a new generation takes up the fight against this corrupt system, joining trade unions and going on strike, risking arrest to save the planet with Just Stop Oil or Extinction Rebellion, and opposing wars that threaten to end the world in a nuclear holocaust, the Sunday Socialist agrees with Trotsky that the Russian Revolution deserves our attention. This weekend we remember those who fought for and gave their lives to bring revolution in Russia and end capitalism once and for all.

NOTHING FOR THE POOR



Photo courtesy of Needpix.com

It's now exactly six months since we started monitoring our basket of budget goods. Six months of turmoil in British politics, three Prime Ministers ago goodness knows how many Chancellors, and an economy that despite various attempts to pull it out of the doldrums is now officially in recession.

For those struggling on low incomes the idea that we have just entered a recession will seem a somewhat laughable proposition. For those on benefits, state pensions and low wages when have we not been in recession? Our 14 items, bought from Aldi one of the budget shops, have risen in just six months by an outrageous 20%. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is currently running at 10.1% so just under half of what we know the real cost of living increase has been.

This is not some conspiracy theory where we reveal that the government have been lying to you. There is always a good chance that politicians are lying (usually only when their lips are moving) but government agencies such as the Office for National Statistics, whilst not entirely neutral, tend to be very good at their jobs. So why is there this difference?

We know that most people have goods - staples - that they buy every week, goods - luxuries - that they buy rarely, and goods that they only buy when they have to. The CPI includes a range of goods including staples, luxuries and rarely bought items. Whilst this makes the figure more accurate across

Rise in cost of goods in our budget since May 15th		
	Price May 15th	Price today
Cheese	1.89	2.65
Milk	0.95	1.25
Bread	0.55	0.72
Apples	1.19	1.49
Spaghetti hoops	0.13	0.16
Margarine	1.09	1.29
Baked beans	0.22	0.26
Digestives	0.39	0.45
Crisps	2.79	3.39
Corn Flakes	0.55	0.59
Fusili	1.29	1.39
Tea bags	0.95	0.99
Tomato soup	0.45	0.49
Pizza	0.99	0.99
TOTAL	13.43	16.11

the economy as a whole it also means that it does not reflect the real burden being faced by those with least.

In the 26 weeks we have been monitoring this small basket of goods, and it's worth stating again that this is not meant to represent a week's groceries, there have only been 6 weeks when nothing has risen. We're not telling you anything you will not have noticed on your own trip to the supermarket. The highest price rise in a single week has been 32p on a basket that originally cost £13.43p. The average rise in a week is about 10p.

These are small amounts but as we have repeatedly said if you have a small income even absorbing a 10p increase can be difficult, at best and impossible at worst.

That is why these changes matter. An increase of 20% on people who cannot afford it is not just a personal tragedy it is the sign of a society that simply does not care. And, it is why we need a total change of system to rebalance the economy.



Compiled by Susie Granic

Further revelations from Manston migrant centre.

Further revelations from Manston migrant centre. After news of the terrible conditions there hit the headlines this week, on Friday it was revealed that Home Office contractors have been trying to sell drugs to asylum seekers. Horrifying that those in a position of trust would prey on the vulnerable, but equally shocking is the news that the individuals concerned have been ‘removed’ from the facility, but no mention of them being sacked. Have they just gone on to another centre?

“Without a Pact we are doomed” says UN secretary-general.

The UN secretary-general, António Guterres, has warned rich countries must sign a “historic pact” with the poor on the climate, or “we will be doomed”. Speaking before the opening of the UN Cop27 climate summit, which begins today in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt Guterres said that developed nations have failed to cut greenhouse gas emissions fast enough and failed to provide the money needed for poor nations to cope with the resulting extreme weather. The glaring climate inequality between the rich world, which is responsible for most emissions, and the poor, which are bearing the brunt of the impacts, is now the biggest issue, he said.

Workers at Heathrow Airport to strike in the run-up to the World Cup

Hundreds of workers are to strike at Heathrow in the run-up to the World Cup with flights to host country Qatar particularly affected. The strike, set to involve 700 workers employed by Dnata (Dubai National Air Travel Agency) and aviation services firm Menzies, will begin early on November 18 and run until the early hours of Monday, November 21. The workers are striking over pay and Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham has said they will have the union’s full backing.

River-boat cruise passengers freed

About 70 tourists were freed on Saturday, after being detained on a boat by an indigenous group, the Cuninico, as part of a protest against a recent oil spill. Three British nationals are believed to be among those that were on board, . They had been held since Thursday, and activists from the Cuninico community released a statement earlier in the week saying that from midnight on 1 November, no boats or vessels would be able to pass until the government entered talks with them.

Norwegian Government refusing to take responsibility for refugees and migrants rescued at sea

The Norwegian government has said it will take no responsibility for refugees and migrants rescued in the Mediterranean Sea and on board boats flying the country’s national flag, after Italy called on both Norway and Germany to take charge of almost 1,000 people stranded off its coast for more than a week and awaiting permission to dock. Italy will not allow the boats to dock and Norway is insisting that it is Italy who bears responsibility. France and Germany have both urged Italy to provide help and both nations have said they will take some of the refugees in. The refugees are basically hostages while nations quibble over whose responsibility it is.

OUR ROUND-UP FROM TRADE UNIONS

Compiled by Teodora Hansen

Teachers the latest to consider strike action

The National Education Union ([NEU](#)) is in the process of balloting for strike action. In a statement they said: “Teachers are facing the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation. Members tell us they are struggling with energy costs and childcare and many are now worried about mortgage payments and how they will cover the rent. While bills are soaring the only thing that seems to be going down is the value of our pay. One in eight teachers leaves the profession after just a year in the classroom – one in three within five. Parents know that teacher shortages are harming education and poor pay is driving teachers away from their children’s schools.”

PCS members at BEIS announce five day strike

[PCS](#) members working at the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) have announced five days’ strike action in disputes over pay and health and safety. Caterers employed by Aramark and cleaners, security guards, reception workers, post and portering staff employed by ISS will take action at BEIS headquarters in Victoria Street, London on 16, 23 and 30 November, and 7 and 14 December. The Aramark employees run the canteen for BEIS staff, as well as providing food for trade delegations. They voted 100% ‘Yes’ for strike action on a 75% turnout after pay talks stalled over a period of months. PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: “A recent survey showed a third of our members were skipping meals because they couldn’t afford to buy food, so it would be no surprise if these hard-working caterers would struggle to afford the food they serve to others.

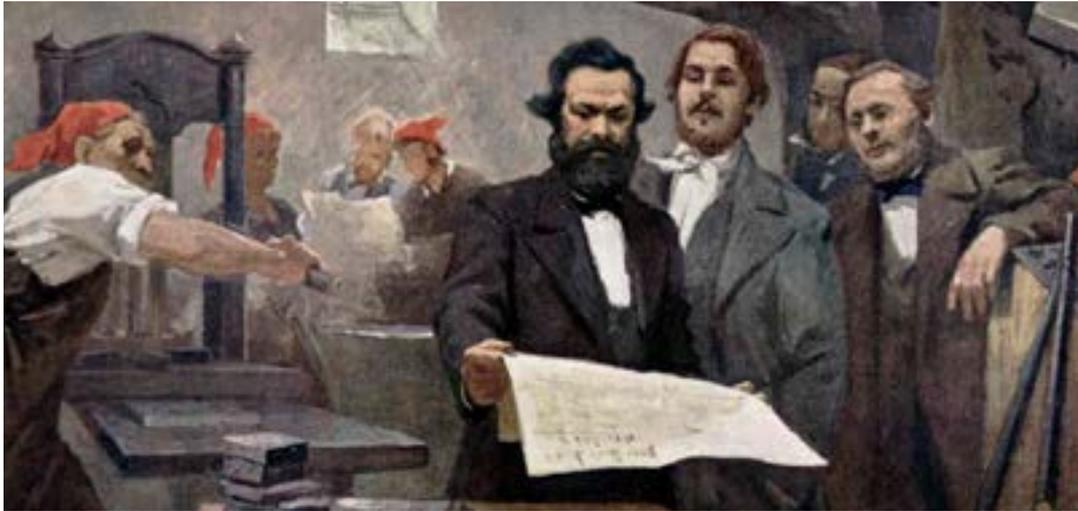
“We demand they receive an above-inflation pay rise to help them through the cost-of-living crisis and beyond.”

Education workers in Ontario face fines for striking

Approximately 55,000 education workers have walked off the job in Canada’s most populous province, after the Ontario government passed legislation this week imposing contracts on them and banning strikes. The workers voted 96.5% in favour of a strike mandate, and served strike notice last week. In response, the Ford government passed legislation to prevent a strike, making job action illegal and imposing a contract on workers. That contract included a provision to fine strikers \$2,968 (4,000 Canadian dollars) for every day they strike. The strikers remain defiant and the Canadian Union of Public Employees ([CUPE](#)) has said they will pay the fines if necessary. CUPE President Karen Ranalletta said: “This isn’t just union busting. It is a draconian measure by a bully government, misusing a legal tool to suppress the rights of its own citizens.”

WORKERS UNITED

Whatever happened to the left? Dave Middleton



E. Capiro, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

[Read online](#)

ANALYSIS

Has the left lost its way? Has it become so diverse that it has lost sight of its goals and values? What is the left exactly? Does it even make sense any longer to speak of the left? Having said all that, was there ever a time when the left was united around a common set of assumptions?

For the purposes of this article I am going to treat ‘the left’ as the socialist left. Not that that helps particularly because for reasons we shall explore, the socialist left is itself far from being a homogenous whole. In fact, it is precisely because the left holds such diverse opinions that finding common ground seems, at times, to be an impossible task.

Those new to socialism, or left-wing politics, are often shocked at the venom with which people who are supposedly on the same side can, at times, attack one another. They wonder, as we all have at one point or another, if my friends treat me this way, what chance do I stand against my enemies?

Although many of the divisions appear new, most have their origins in debates that have been raging since the term socialism was first used. Understanding how those divisions arose may not necessarily help us to overcome them but at least allows us to see why they arouse such passion in their supporters.

Early socialism

The early socialists such as [Saint-Simonian](#) and [Robert Owen](#) were philanthropists and social reformers who were often driven by their religious beliefs toward a utopian socialism which, whilst critical of the brutality of the nascent capitalist system, regarded industrialisation, and often imperial expansion, as civilising influences in a brutal and dangerous world.

Until the twentieth century, socialism was pretty much the preserve of God-fearing, social reformers on a mission to change, for the better, the depraved existence of ordinary people. Alongside these new ideas was growing, as a result of industrialisation, a new form of organisation among those most brutalised by the excesses of capitalism. Enter stage left: the trade union movement.

In a sense this was the first divide between those calling themselves socialists. For some, socialism is a moralistic set of ideals which may, or may not, have religious forebears. For

others, it was a practical means of improving the conditions of the labouring classes. It seems to me that the division still exists, with some arguing for socialism as essentially a set of values that all socialists should sign up to and others seeing socialism as a response to the material situation created by capitalism. It's not that the two sides of that divide cannot talk but whilst for one side those 'values' represent socialism, for the other the 'values' are an off-shoot of struggles between workers and bosses over material conditions. One important point here is that neither side are, by definition, strong on theory. However, many materialists are attracted to Marxism itself, a materialist reaction to the idealism of Hegel.

Historically trade union struggle gave birth to the socialist movement as we understand it today. It is difficult now to imagine just how brutal life was for the average working person in those days. Workers would have to work 14 or 15 hour days, six days a week, with no holidays, sick pay or pensions. Workers were not just men, but entire families, including children as young as five or six. Life was, in the words of the conservative philosopher Thomas Hobbes, "nasty, brutish and short".

Trade unions and the working class

Trade union organisation, fought at every step of its development by employers who claimed it would ruin the economy, was something anybody who called themselves a socialist could support. For Marx it brought into being a new class that, ultimately, could challenge the ruling class for dominance - the proletariat.

People often conflate the proletariat with 'the working class' but, in a strict Marxist sense, the proletariat are a small part of the entire working class, comprising that part of the class who are engaged in active productive work.

By 1848 the new trade unions were finding their voice. Demands for better pay and more humane working conditions led to a wave of proto-revolutionary movements across Europe. Many felt, as William Wordsworth had felt, when inspired by the French Revolution in 1789, "[Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive](#)". [Cities from Paris to Palermo, Budapest to Berlin were littered with barricades, built from paving stones and heaped up with furniture, overturned carriages and even pianos.](#) The outcome of 1848 was, ultimately, a defeat, but it was a defeat that taught some socialist thinkers a massive lesson.

Although not written in response to these events, Marx's and Engels' Manifesto of the Communist Party was published at the same time. This tiny booklet gave a condensed rendition of the key parts of Marx's historical materialism, and, perhaps most importantly, gave socialists something to unite around. Whilst the 1848 revolutions were mainly nationalistic in flavour, they inspired hundreds, even thousands, of young radicals who, armed with a Marxist understanding of history and class began to form themselves into 'working class parties'.

Reform or revolution?

By the early 20th Century genuinely radical and popular parties had emerged. The majority of socialists had no issue at all with nailing the colours to the Marxist mast, and most of the social democratic parties which sprung up across Europe adopted one form or other of Marxism. The direction that these parties should take in pursuit of Marxism was hotly contested. This was no more so than in the German Social Democratic Party where rival factions under the leadership of [Eduard Bernstein](#) and [Rosa Luxemburg](#) contested the road to socialism as a contest between reform or revolution. In arguing for a gradualist approach to social change, Bernstein used the formulation: "The Final goal, no matter what it is, is nothing; the movement is everything."

Luxemburg opposed Bernstein and party leader Karl Kautsky at the SPD congress in 1898, launching a blistering attack on Bernstein who she regarded as a traitor to Marxism. This division into reformists and revolutionaries characterised the socialist movement for most of the twentieth century. It is a divide that still exists and, since the downfall of the USSR in 1989, is one in which the reformists have been in the ascendancy. Part of the problem is that desiring social change creates for many people a belief that they are part of the socialist movement, which, of course, they are. But, social change without a theory is simply activity. Some of that activity will be successful - strikes, protests, even parliamentary elections, but each of them leave capitalism intact. So for years the socialist movement has harboured under an

illusion. that socialism can be achieved within the capitalist system simply by managing it in the interests of ordinary people, not the rich. It's an appealing idea but totally devoid of any empirical support or theoretical foundation.

The Russian Revolutions of 1917 were a cause for celebration amongst socialists seeking a transformation of the world. By 1914 and the outbreak of World War One the social democratic parties across Europe were uniformly in favour of the imperialist war. The SPD, the British Labour Party and others all swung behind their national war efforts. The Bolsheviks in Russia were the exception and it was, at least partly, to bring an end to that horrendous conflict that spurred the revolution's battle cry. The slogan behind which millions of ordinary Russians rallied was '[Peace. Land, Bread](#)'. There is no doubt that the Russian Revolution was the seminal event of the 20th Century but it was doomed from the start without the revolution spreading. [The failed German Revolution of 1919](#), led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebnicht's Spartacist League, was the death knell for socialism in Russia which quickly found itself surrounded on all sides by hostile forces.

By 1921 the revolutionaries were turning on each other, and the death of Lenin and the succession of Stalin meant a turn from workers' councils (Soviets) and a bureaucratic regime in which, as Trotsky said, "The party organisation would at first.. substitute itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee would substitute itself for the organisation; and finally a single 'dictator' would substitute himself for the Central Committee.. "

The socialist movement, already split between reformists and revolutionaries, now had a new split between those who believed Stalinist Russia represented actually existing socialism and those who regarded it as either a 'deformed workers' state' or 'state capitalist'.

Unity and values

When I see people saying that we need to unite and that we need to do so around our common values I am reminded that a disunited left has been a feature of socialism since its earliest days.

Many people who claim to be socialists and are absolutely passionate in their belief that we need social change have no idea how that change can be achieved. They move from one social movement to the next, arguing for first this new policy, then this new leader and are prone to believe in whatever the current popular theory is without stopping to ponder why we never seem to take a step forward.

The left, if indeed we can talk of anything as coherent as 'the left', is actually a variety of different people with different values, different beliefs and different theoretical positions. Each is passionate that they know the answers but most would seriously struggle to tell you what the questions are. If this seems a harsh judgement, it is not meant to be. I have the greatest respect for those who glue themselves to banks and turn up for endless meetings to select the next parliamentary candidate. Many believe that Marxism has been disproven by events in Russia, China, and so on, but in rejecting the Marxist analysis of social class, historical change and capitalist economy they have not been able to provide a theory of change to replace it with. The abandonment of Marxism by so many on the left has left a void which is not simply theoretical. It is practical. Marxists, for all their flaws, do have a theory which explains the capitalist mode of production, exploitation, alienation and offers the means by which those things can be overcome.

Instead of promoting a vision whereby the working class can take control of their own lives and plan production in a way which benefits everybody, too many on the left have opted instead to put all their faith in 'representatives' to vote through social changes on their behalf. This parliamentary infatuation has left us arguing for the various reforms that might alleviate the worst symptoms of capitalism without fundamentally changing the system.

Capitalism is a fundamentally flawed social system in every respect bar its ability to create enormous wealth for one small sector and then to convince the rest of us that this arrangement is natural. The left took a wrong turn in losing sight of the real goal of socialism which remains the total transformation of society. Stalinism, as the real world application of Marxism, did so much damage to the credibility of socialists worldwide, but it is nothing compared to the damage done by reformism which provides false hope and has drained the energy and commitment of socialists for generations. The answer to the question "Whatever happened to the left?" is rather simple. They haven't gone anywhere.

Is the NHS safe in anyone's hands?

by Marilyn Tyzack

ANALYSIS



"No society can legitimately call itself civilised if a sick person is denied medical aid because of a lack of means."



We keep hearing about the creeping privatisation of the NHS, alongside serious underfunding. But what does this mean in practice for a service we all rely on, but which we are constantly told is struggling to meet demand?

There is, of course, a complexity around alternative proposals to fund the NHS that is 'off putting' to anyone who does not have a specialist interest in the subject.

Successive governments have relied on this disinterest to push through proposals that are a real threat to the concept of a free health service funded by taxation.

After all we just 'feel' the inherent security of a national health service that we have been led to believe will care for us from the cradle to the grave. It will have touched all our lives at some point, whether as a patient, a visitor, or waiting for a much-needed operation. We will therefore all have opinions as to the quality of the care and treatment received. Those views will, consciously or unconsciously, be benchmarked against our expectations, and those expectations have been embedded in the British psyche since the NHS was launched in 1948.

Nye Bevan's Dream

The creation of the NHS was not easy. It emerged as a result of passion and conflict. The passion was a vision articulated by [Nye Bevan](#) at the time that "No society can legitimately call itself civilised, if a sick person is denied medical aid because of a lack of means."

He fought tenaciously for this belief, against, at times, intense hostility from the opposition, but mainly from the BMA who wanted to retain the right for doctors to treat their wealthier patients privately. He later described his 'compromise' with the phrase "[I stuffed their mouths with gold.](#)"

This, of course, was a forced acceptance of a two-tier system, and has been used to justify later proposals that have attempted to increase the private sector's involvement in the NHS.

He was though determined in his commitment to the fact that the NHS would not be second rate, that it would be free to everyone who needed it, and, importantly, that it would cover all medical needs at every stage of people's lives, including dental care. He also pointed out that it was not a charity. People would pay for it through their taxes but... the public were told at the launch, "[It will relieve your money worries in time of illness.](#)"

The Creation of the Myths

There is no doubt that the creation of the NHS was a bold and visionary step, particularly as the UK economy was in a parlous state, having just emerged from WWII. UK national debt peaked in the late 1940s at over 230% of GDP. This is compared with the rate today of 96.6%.

It was, therefore, perhaps not surprising that two key myths emerged at this time. These myths have been accepted as fact by successive governments of both political persuasions and have led to the watering down of the original vision for the NHS.

Myth Number 1 – The NHS is unaffordable

Just a few years after its launch, the rumblings around affordability started. Cabinet Papers from the 1950s highlighted concerns. The point was made that the concept of the NHS was based on the view that, as people's health improved, the cost of the NHS would fall. In reality people demanded more services, and the cost of providing these increased year on year.

The question of cost made the National Health Service (NHS) into a major political issue, and this has continued to this day. It began as a debate within the post-war Labour Government, with proposals to introduce charges for certain items. Nye Bevan was horrified to see his vision challenged at such an early stage. He therefore commissioned an enquiry into the efficiency of the new service. This found that NHS spending was actually good value for money.

This didn't stop Gaitskell introducing a cap on NHS spending in 1950, and the tax cutting Conservatives who won the 1951 election followed this by introducing charges for prescriptions and dental care.

The issue of cost remained at the top of the agenda for the rest of the Conservative period in office. Yet another study, The Guilleband Report of 1955 found that costs within the National Health Service were not excessive and that there was no way to make cuts without reducing services.

So, the myth that the NHS is costing too much started almost from its inception. It was challenged at the time by two official reports and ignored.

Today, the myth continues, despite the release of an Office of National Statistics (ONS) report in 2019 which showed that:

of the G7 group of large, developed economies, UK healthcare spending per person at £2,989 per person was the second lowest, with the highest spenders being France (£3,737), Germany (£4,432) and the United States (£7,736).

As a percentage of GDP, UK healthcare spending fell from 9.8% in 2013 to 9.6% in 2017, while healthcare spending as a percentage of GDP rose for four of the remaining six G7 countries.

It is clear, then, that the concerns by successive governments and right wing think tanks about the cost of the NHS is not about it being too expensive or not providing 'value for money'. It is about the ratio between the levels of taxation necessary to support the service and the amount of public borrowing seen as acceptable. This is rarely articulated. It needs to be said.

Myth 2 – The NHS needs Private Sector Money

Following Gaitskell's cold feet just a few years after its launch, and the Conservative Government's attempts to water down provision to fulfil its tax cutting manifesto, there was a period of calm. But this was the calm before the storm.

The election of Thatcher in 1979, with a neoliberal agenda of rolling back the state, while reducing taxation even further, put the concept of the NHS at real risk. Large swathes of industries nationalised by the post-war Labour Government were put back in private sector hands. Key central government services were put out to tender.

Interestingly, though, when it came to the NHS, Thatcher was keen to demonstrate that it would be safe in her hands.

This didn't stop her contracting out essential roles such as cleaners, porters and catering staff, despite evidence at the time that they were being provided more efficiently in-house. The results were an increase in infections across hospitals and the loss of flexibility that so many hospitals depended on.

The Scourge of the Private Finance Initiative

It was, however, the implementation of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), in Norman Lamont's 1992 Autumn Statement, that really changed the political landscape.

The concept was relatively simple. PFI required projects above a certain minimum scale (in the NHS this was initially above £5m) to be opened for bids from the private sector with repayments over a prolonged period of 25-30 years or more.

Labour's Reform Programme

This concept was enthusiastically endorsed by the Blair Government.

At the same time Labour's Reform Programme for the NHS went much further than the Tories and saw an increased role for the private sector. [In a speech to community health chiefs in Harrogate](#), Patricia Hewitt was forced to calm staff and the public by apologising for publishing plans without consultation that would have forced primary care trusts to contract out all district nursing, family planning clinics and other local health services.

The Blair Government therefore embraced the myth, endorsed by Thatcher in the early 1980s, that public service efficiency depended on private sector competition.

At no point was it explained why this made economic sense. After all the private sector needed to extract money from the budget to reward its shareholders and borrowed at rates far higher than the Government was able to do.

The costs of these experiments have been huge.

Cost of PFI – Pure Financial Idiocy

The reality is that £13 bn of investment by the private sector gravy train has now risen to over £80bn, which NHS hospitals are expected to find out of budgets that, in turn, have been cut year on year.

It is perhaps no wonder that the acronym has been parodied as 'Profits For Industry', 'Profiting From Illness', or simply 'Pure Financial Idiocy'.

Where are we now?

In an article of this length, it would be impossible to identify all the changes, many of which are hugely complex, imposed on the NHS since its formation.

Suffice it to say, that in the so-called interests of efficiency and reducing the tax burden, there has been a move of resources away from the public to the private sector.

Even before the dust has had time to settle on one so called innovative form of restructuring, the NHS has been faced with further changes, all with the objectives of cutting costs.

The latest plan, Integrated Care Partnerships, outlines new ways of delivering services that provides further, far-reaching opportunities for the private sector.

The NHS is affordable. The NHS Does Not Need Private Sector Money

It cannot be said too loudly or often enough. Report after report has shown how the NHS provides value for money. It is also not expensive compared to schemes in other industrial countries. Yes, there may be waste and some inefficiencies. We also have a serious staffing shortage. But this is a problem of government, not the NHS. It certainly won't be solved by allowing private companies to cherry pick what they see as the most profitable elements. The disastrous PFI experiment is a warning that cannot be ignored.

The only way that we can protect Nye Bevan's dream and hard fought for reality is to challenge those myths at every opportunity.

The NHS is not expensive. It is affordable.

Low taxes are the enemy of the dream.

IS THE FALL OF CAPITALISM INEVITABLE?

This is already a post-capitalism world. Competition is carefully managed by mergers and takeovers involving a few monolithic organisations. These corporations concentrate ownership of resources, becoming in the process more powerful than the nation state – whose role is reduced to providing legitimacy, minimising regulation and protecting intellectual property rights. The blackmailing or bribing of politicians is the cost of doing business.

The ability of monopolies to adapt, exploit new markets and control resources (including information) appears endless. Their greed causes wars over oil, gas, water and food supplies.

And consider this: Taiwan produces 65% of global semiconductors and 90% of advanced chips...

@EthicalRenewal

Strictly speaking nothing is inevitable. However, no social system, no matter how seemingly insurmountable, has ever gone on forever. So, there is always hope. This much we know for sure. Despite its amazingly resilient nature capitalism lurches from one crisis to the next with the periods of non-crisis becoming shorter and shorter. What we also know is that the victims of capitalist crisis are inevitably the poorest. It's only considered a recession when the middle classes are involved. For the sake of the planet, now reaching crisis point in terms of sustaining human life, the downfall of capitalism cannot come quickly enough. For the sake of all of us who crave only a life worth living joining the fight for socialism offers the best way forward to end exploitation, inequality and alienation. Whether it's inevitable or not is not the question, what can we do to transcend capitalism is. **Dave Middleton**

Going by Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, the answer should be self-evidently “yes.” The late Ursula K LeGuin once said “We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.” She said this before an audience of Amazon investors. They'd expected her to deliver some trite speech of gratitude for a prize she'd won, and instead received a warning about their future. When an ideology's time is up, inevitably they court nationalism, racism, and fascism to prop up their dying power with muscle. Open violence becomes common. The law seems nonexistent. The 1% chortle, but behind the laughter is an edge of despair at the thought of us storming the gates of their decadent Winter Palaces. The end of capitalism isn't just inevitable. It's happening now.

Alex Greene

Capitalism is supposed to be free market competition. It drives innovation, raises productivity and gives us freedom of choice. There is even the idea that a free market and a free society go together, that competition will drive out dictatorships in favour of democracy while it drives down poverty through spreading technical advances around the world.

Now that we are beset by war and crises we are told that we need more competition not less. Otherwise Capitalism will end, not with socialism, but with a new social order based on oligarchic monopolies that can override the will of the people as expressed through democratic elections.

But the essence of Capitalism is not found in the marketplace. It is in the workplace and the extraction of surplus value from the working class. Even a world dictatorship which owned all the wealth would still be Capitalist until we wrested control of the means of production in a Socialist Revolution. **Mike Stanton**

For Marx, it was incomprehensible that workers would accept the exploitation and gross inequalities inherent in the capitalist economic system. They were bound to revolt and replace capitalism with socialism. It is though difficult to accept that this is inevitable. The huge imbalance of power between capital and labour has meant that even small changes were not achieved without a bitter fight, The power exerted by the ruling class has not just been used to exploit people in the workplace, it has been used to control the means of communication, so that many continue to assume that their interests and the interests of their bosses are identical.

However, as we lurch from crisis to crisis, the scales are starting to fall. So the fall of capitalism whilst not inevitable is becoming more likely. **Marilyn Tyzack**

Next week's question: Is there such a thing as a just war? Send your answers (no more than 100 words) to:

edgenotes@creatingsocialism.org

NOTES FROM THE EDGE



The white poppy – remembering all victims of war

Jo Buchanan



OPINION

The time of year has come around again when poppies are being sold and worn all over the country. There is a sense, encouraged by many in the media, that wearing a red Flanders Poppy is a moral obligation to show our thanks and give honour to soldiers who lost their lives, especially in the First and Second World Wars. More than 67 million people have died in conflicts since 1918, and very many more have suffered the devastating effects of war. There have been and still are wars in many parts of the world, and it feels wrong that the red poppy and the services associated with it do little to promote peace and that our thoughts are not with all victims of war.

Red poppies were first sold in 1921 by the British Legion as symbols of remembrance and hope for a peaceful future. The red poppy was chosen as it was a flower found frequently on the Flanders battlefields during World War I. The British Legion states that [“poppies are worn as a show of support for the Armed Forces community”](#). Since 2019 it has included civilians as worthy of remembrance, but still only people on ‘our side’. This does not extend to people of all nationalities.

Militarism continued to grow after the First World War. In response to this, white poppies were created to promote a pacifist message. The first white poppies were made in 1933 by the Women’s Cooperative Guild. Many members of the [Women’s Cooperative Guild](#) had experienced the deaths of loved ones, fathers, husbands, brothers and sons in World War One. The Guild’s General Secretary was Eleanor Barton. She made a statement calling for “that ‘Never Again’ spirit that was strong in 1918, but seems to grow weaker as years go on”.

The Women’s Cooperative Guild was dedicated to promoting international peace and had become concerned that the symbol of the red poppy was increasingly associated with the rise in militarisation. The Guild decided early on that one of the organisations to benefit from the proceeds of the sale of white poppies was [War Resisters international](#). Meanwhile it assured the public that they were not trying to detract from anything that could contribute to improving the lives of war veterans: “The Guild was most anxious that nothing should be done that would prejudice the help given to disabled soldiers.”

Three years after the first white poppies went on sale, [the Peace Pledge Union \(PPU\)](#) took on the responsibility for their creation and has continued to produce them for the last 86

years. White poppies are now made by Calverts, a workers' co-operative based in East London, specialising in socially and environmentally responsible print design. This year all the white poppies are paper based and recyclable.

The PPU works towards bringing current conflicts to an end and preventing future wars. It argues that it is a matter of urgency to highlight the devastating effects of war, to discover nonviolent solutions to conflict, and to work for peace. "A temporary absence of violence is not enough. Peace is much deeper and broader than that, requiring major social changes to allow us to live more cooperatively." As well as challenging the glorification of war and the justifications for it, the PPU asks us to question why war has become normalised and clarifies that the symbolism of the white poppy represents "remembrance for all victims of war, a commitment to peace and a challenge to the attempt to glamorise or celebrate war". It stresses the importance of including victims of war from long ago to the present day, those who suffered in colonial conflicts, civilians and all nationalities.

In wearing white poppies, we remember all those killed in war, all those wounded in body or mind, the millions who have been made sick or homeless by war and the families and communities torn apart. We also remember those killed or imprisoned for refusing to fight and for resisting war.... suffering does not stop at national borders, and nor should remembrance.

White poppies have proved controversial, and there has always been opposition from a number of quarters, from the militarist sections of society and others who see it as a sign of disrespect or do not wish to cause offence to the establishment and to those who had fought in wars or had relatives who fought and suffered or died. White poppy wearers have been accused of cowardice and the PPU accused of encouraging conscientious objection and mounting a challenge to our traditional values.

Today some people still contest the production and wearing of the white poppy on the grounds that buying a red poppy would raise more money for wounded veterans. However, people who purchase a white poppy also contribute to charities set up to assist disabled soldiers. And surely those who are now suffering as a result of their experiences in the forces should be receiving generous support from the state? The Welfare State has been increasingly underfunded by the UK Government, a government which should be supporting veterans, but maintains the [fourth highest military budget in the world](#).

There are politicians who promote and profit from arms sales who can be seen laying wreaths at the Cenotaph. Money is found to promote weapons sales, to increase military spending, invest in nuclear weapons and support today's wars, and so our Government persists in contributing to wars in various parts of the world. It is abundantly clear from the many wars which have broken out throughout history that these conflicts have devastating consequences and fail to achieve lasting peace. Wars are so often caused by competition for resources, by inequality and by poverty. They are integral to the way capitalism operates, where there is a constant search for new resources, often in the Global South, where the extraction of raw materials seriously affects the well-being of communities and disrupts their lifestyles and where people are exploited in low-paid employment. Capitalism increases the competition for resources and leads to the breakdown of the social fabric. And of course large sums of money can be made from war. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported that in 2020, despite the shrinking of the global economy, weapons sales and the sales of military services by the main 100 firms concerned had increased every year since 2015. In 2020 these sales had reached a record figure of \$531bn.

The radical changes we need cannot be made easily, but it is surely both just and logical to focus our attention on these serious problems and find solutions for them in order to prevent further slaughter.

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25 years ago an Italian village showed how asylum seekers should be treated

Susie Granic

WITH refugees at the forefront of many people's minds after the attempted attack in Kent and revelations about conditions at migrant centres here, it's a good time to look back at what the mayor and residents of an Italian town did 25 years ago, and how welcoming migrants rather than vilifying and harassing them can work to the betterment of everyone's lives.

I remember reading about this town, Badolato, many years ago and feeling so inspired by the kindness and compassion shown by a whole community. Badolato, a small seaside town along the eastern coast of Calabria, the southern tip of Italy, had been growing more empty since the Italian government built homes further along the coast near the train station, which became Badolato Marina. The town proper became almost abandoned with the population decreasing from about 7,000 in the fifties to only 600, and most of these elderly.

In December 1997, however, this changed. A ship turned up on Badolato's shores, its captain and crew quickly disappeared into the night and 836 disorientated refugees came ashore. As the mayor, Gerardo Mannello of the communist party, and residents gathered the refugees together, feeding them, giving them fresh clothing, and talking to them, a plan which had been forming in the mayor's mind took shape. Why not inhabit the town with refugee families, bring it to life again?

The Italian government of the time actually agreed with his plan and allotted funds to the town, and it was an immediate success. More than 300 of the mainly Kurdish refugees were housed in the town and worked alongside their Italian hosts in renovating houses and working for local farmers and builders in nearby towns. The refugees, mainly young men, were warmly welcomed by the older inhabitants who had watched as their children had left for bigger towns and cities and were thrilled to have young people around once more.

New stores and restaurants were opened and jobs created. And today the town thrives with many new restaurants and visitors from all over the world who came to see what was being done with these refugees, and then continued to come back. The town even has its own refugee centre now.

The big difference between what the mayor and people of Badolato did, and what we see in the media today regarding refugees, is that Gerardo Mannello saw the refugees not as a new problem, but as a solution to an existing one.

Badolato is not the only Italian town to do this, and it certainly has not been without its problems, a large one being that many of the young refugees eventually followed their Italian counterparts to the bigger cities, but is it not an example worth following?

Mannello's words will resonate with many of us: "It was something that I felt I could do for these people," he said. "Seeing these people in difficulty and disoriented, if you have any feeling inside you, you feel for them."