
Is socialism dead?

Sean Matgamna and Kenneth Minogue

Sean Matgamna

WE ARE DISCUSSING “Is Socialism Dead?” because of the collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. The question there is: what, if anything, did the Soviet Union have to do with socialism? Yet there is a more immediate reason why we are discussing this issue in Britain. For ten years now the British working class has suffered a series of defeats. If we had not had those defeats we would not have the climate of ideas we now have, and we would not be discussing issues in this way. Quite likely, there would be euphoria in most of the labour movement about the collapse of Stalinism.

We are Trotskyists. We are in Trotsky’s tradition. Unfortunately, “Trotskyism” today means very little. You need more information other than the word itself. To us it means that we are with the people who stood against the rise of Stalinism. We are with the people who were in Siberia, in the labour camps. Who organised hunger strikes in Stalin’s prisons. Who tried to defend the Soviet working class against Stalinism. Who defended working-class freedom in the USSR in the 1920s. We are also with the people who made the Russian Revolution. We do not attempt to ingratiate ourselves with the bourgeoisie. We are with the people who shot the Tsar and who used the state against the capitalists. We stand for genuine Marxian socialism.

The idea that Stalinism has anything to do with socialism is based on a series of misrepresentations. We do not want state socialism. Marxists believe that ultimately society will be organised without coercion, without the state. The real roots of bureaucracy in British capitalist society and of bureaucratic tyranny in the USSR are in the fact that both these types of society are ruled by a minority. This minority cannot tolerate real democracy. At best it will concede — as in Britain — shallow forms of democracy. These societies cannot allow real self-rule by the people. Because real self-rule cannot be allowed, we get bureaucratic rule — although the levels of bureaucracy differ, sometimes greatly. Marxists believe that once the rule of the bourgeoisie is smashed and the self-rule of the people is a reality, we will not have a state in any of the old senses. We will not have the type of bureaucratism characteristic of Stalinism.

Marxist socialists believe socialism can only come out of advanced capitalism, that it can not come from anywhere else. Trotsky and Lenin did not

believe that you could take a backward part of the world, the old Czarist empire, cordon it off and build a viable utopian socialist colony there. Marx laughed at people with basically similar ideas — people who wanted to build socialist colonies in America. The Russian Stalinists tried to build a vast quasi-utopian system counterposed to capitalism. That collapsed because it was not possible for a

backward country to overtake and outstrip the power and the might and the wealth of the world bourgeoisie.

The Bolsheviks led a workers' revolution in a country where socialism was not possible. They were right to take power. They wanted to see a European and a world movement of the workers taking power. They wanted advanced, capitalist Germany, which was ripe for socialism, to be taken by the workers. In 1917 socialists understood that socialism was not state tyranny: socialism was the elimination of the capitalist system, of wage slavery and the substitution of co-operatively organised society, with a real democracy.

One of the central criticisms Marxists make of capitalism is that it develops ideas it cannot make good on, cannot deliver. Capitalism suffers from a giant flaw: capitalism means private ownership of the social means of production, so real equality is impossible in capitalism

We have formal equality — for example, equality before the law. But economic inequality disrupts and destroys the possibilities for social equality.

If, ten or 15 years ago, someone made a socialist speech like this, the speaker might well be saying that it does not matter if the democracy that existed in Britain were suppressed; that it would not be a bad thing to have a Stalinist system instead. I am not saying that. I think the sort of liberty we have in capitalist Britain would be worth defending against the "stormtroopers" of capitalism who, in all probability, at some time in the future, will come — as they came to Germany under Hitler and to Chile, in 1973, under Pinochet. Nevertheless, British democracy is a great deal short of real self-rule.

The Russian revolution was made by Marxists with the full knowledge that socialism could not be built amid Russian backwardness. The collapse of Russian Stalinism is a vindication of Marxism. That does not lessen the triumphalism of the bourgeoisie at the collapse, or lessen the pressure on faint-hearted people.

Mr Minogue attacks the bureaucracy we find in Britain. Minogue attacks the waste of a welfare state, which of course is superimposed on the capitalist system. But to a considerable extent, when Minogue attacks these things, calling them socialism, what he is actually attacking is the evolution of capitalism itself. The sort of statism which has been attacked by the so-called libertarian right is itself the product of capitalism. Monopolies long ago developed across the capitalist world, and the state and industry began to combine — for war and the plundering of colonies — a century and more ago. Into this development have come the demands of the labour movement, for example, for welfare reforms. Desirable and good goals — like a welfare state — have been strangled with bureaucracy arising out of the conditions of the British

capitalist class society. Much of what Minogue and people of his outlook attack is bureaucratic monopoly capitalism – for which they then blames the socialists. This is a species of ideological card-sharping.

And there is more cheating about the legacy of Stalinism. Stalinism did not exist in the world on its own. During the long period of Stalinist rule in various countries, the bourgeoisie was the dominant world force. They are now realising their fullest domination with the collapse of Stalinism. Throughout this period many of the horrors of Stalinism can be traced to capitalism. For example, there are few things more terrible than the rule of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. They treated a large part of their own people as Hitler treated the Jews. Yet how were the Khmer Rouge produced? This psychotic social formation arose after the modern, democratic, bourgeois USA bombed Cambodia “into the Stone Age”. Stalinism cannot be taken in isolation from the capitalist world in which it existed. Even Stalinism in the Soviet Union did not happen in isolation from capitalism. Fourteen states, including Britain, invaded Soviet Russia between 1918 and 1921. That was one of the factors which, by its effects on the economy, led to the rise of Stalinism.

One argument we meet is this: despite all the imperfections of capitalism, nevertheless this system is the best we can get. “Anti-utopianism” is very fashionable now. If we want to achieve a better society we are “utopians”. And, comrades, “utopianism” is dangerous! Apparently it leads to Jacobin terror and Stalinism. Of course, Marxists do not condemn capitalism totally. The Communist Manifesto contains a great paean of praise, by Karl Marx, to the capitalist system. He truly says that the capitalists have done wonderful things.

Capitalism is progressive in history. It creates the conditions whereby capitalist ideals of liberty and equality can actually be realised – though the bourgeois class can not do it. From this point of view, capitalism has been progressive. In previous epochs of history class society was necessary. In ancient Greece, when Aristotle argued in favour of slavery, he was arguing for a necessary condition for their actual civilisation.

I would concede that the capitalism we have in Britain is better than Stalinism. Indeed, it is nearer to socialism. Yet capitalism is still a dog-eat-dog system. Capitalism can work. It can continue for a long time. But in the 20th century it survived only by destroying large parts of the means of production in the Great Slump, creating mass unemployment, and by going into world wars. We hear about the horrors of Stalinism. I do not excuse them. But in this century we witnessed the near destruction of European civilisation — by forces arising from capitalism. If you walk down the streets from the London School of Economics, where Mr Minogue, you find people asleep in doorways. In Lincoln’s Inn Fields, nearby, there are hundreds of people camped. We live in a world where homelessness is nowadays considered almost normal. A world where culture is degraded to the lowest common denominator by the profit motive. Where the mass of the population is not educated to have the possibility of realising real self-rule. All these horrors are rooted in the fact that

there is private, minority ownership of the means of production and everything is geared to exercising, justifying and maintaining the rule of that minority of big capitalists.

Capitalism has its horrors, too.

Right now, we can see the outlines of three great trade blocs emerging: America, Japan and Europe. If capitalism once again slows down, and there is no reason to presume it will not, eventually, there is the possibility of conditions something like those of the 1930s. The nightmare scenario of an eventual "1984" world with three great warring powers. Capitalism is not a stable system. Capitalism is progressive, historically, allowing the creation of a working class. But then the working class must seize its historic destiny and put itself in conscious control of society. The alternative will not always be a bourgeois democracy like the one we have in Britain now.

It is arguable that we can not completely do away with the market. Who needs to do such a thing? But what we can do is eliminate the private ownership of the means of production and the wage slavery that is inseparable from it, and introduce real, democratic self-control in all spheres of society, including the economic.

Is socialism dead? No!- and it will not die until capitalism is dead. Socialism is a product of and an answer to capitalism. The capitalists can win victories in the class struggle, but they cannot eliminate the working class. The class struggle will continue and the workers' movement will revive. Socialism will revive.

We are witnessing the purging of socialism of all the encrustations of Fabian statism and Stalinism. This is the purification of socialism. We are seeing the emergence of the opportunity for real socialism to expand. This is not the end of history. This is a new phase of history where real socialism will have a far better chance than it had when our heroic comrades took power in Russia in October 1917.

Kenneth Minogue

A lot depends on definitions. There are a lot of packaged words: capitalism, socialism, workers' power, democracy. These have been shuffled like a packs of cards. When Sean Matgamna says "Stalinism was never what socialists believed to be socialism" he is simply wrong. This is a matter of historical fact. Great numbers of people fought for the defence of the Soviet Union as the homeland of socialism. It is only as the project has more obviously failed that they gave it up.

I was struck by a story from the Tiananmen Square episode. It was repeated in Moscow. In both cases some luckless person said: "Now I know what fascism really means". Now why did these people choose the word "fascism"? These people were communists, not fascists. I think this illustrates one of the ways in which socialism is a type of perpetual virgin, never touched by experience. In Islam, the reward of warriors going to paradise is to meet women for

ever reconstituted as virgins. Socialism is like this.

Sean Matgamna says that socialism is sometimes regarded as an ideal which is too good for us. It is a marvellous idea which we can not actually achieve. Matgamna believes it can be achieved. I believe revolutionary workers' socialism is pretty dead. All forms of socialism ought to be dead. I would like to see a stake through its heart. It has caused more death, unpleasantness and boredom than almost any other doctrine. Socialism involves a curious conception of society: a society in which there are no rich or poor; no aristocratic or bourgeois; no people dying for love or dreaming of getting rich; no scandal, gossip, monarchy — all the things which keep us enthused. We have little comrades slotted into a society where their needs are perfectly satisfied. This happens not to be the type of world I would like to live in.

If we ask: what is the opposite of socialism?, the obvious answer is capitalism. Capitalism is one of those packages containing everything. Capitalism contains the experiences in this hall, a type of socialism within capitalism. All over Britain you will find Hari Krishna people trying to worship at Stonehenge. You find a vast number of activities. The point about capitalism is that a great number of people do a vast number of different things with a great number of conflicting beliefs. This plurality distinguishes capitalism from socialism. You have to believe in socialism in order to live in a socialist society. You do not have to believe in capitalism to live in a capitalist society. According to quite respectable opinion you better not have a religion in a socialist society. The Russians set up the League of the Godless to remove all the nonsense from people's minds. The contrast is therefore between socialism as a single way of life, right through society, and capitalism as immensely plural.

How did the notion of capitalism as a single thing ever get going? The answer is that Marx, recommending a single way of life to a set of people "who were already accustomed to a great plurality of ways of life, for rhetorical purposes had to present capitalism as a unity. Marx said: you may think you are as free as the birds, but in fact capital determines everything about you — it is a single system. This is a major mistake underlying Marxism. If you ask: what is the opposite of socialism?, the answer is individualism. Individualism is almost unavoidably the type of life you live in a modern society. What people in modern society do is to distinguish themselves from others, select their clothes, wear jewellery which contrasts with others. In thousands of ways individual endeavour is central to humans in a modern society. We go through these vanities — then we die. Dying is important people think a lot about it. What did Marx say about death? He writes a single sentence: death is a biological accident. This is an interesting comment which tells you a lot about Marx.

The way I would interpret it would be to connect it with other texts where Marx says there is no such thing as human nature; this is an ideological mystification, humans are essentially historical creatures without any essential nature. What I take Marx to mean is that a human being is social input plus organic transferences. Man is simply matter on which society makes its

imprint. Marx's view is that a human being is the matter out of which societies are constructed. Now this is a significant part of Marx's doctrine I think Marx imagined a communist society to be rather like a giant computer. Every individual, no longer alienated, would have the great power of society available. By contrast to the present world, what he hated about capitalism is that we as individuals are alienated from each other, we have shames. It is the thing Christians mean by original sin.

Some types of socialist are people who have a vision of society and who think that the only valuable thing is a society which is lived in a certain sort of way. In order to do this there has to be "engineering". Just as in any fabricating you may well want to dispose of unsuitable material, what every socialist or communist ruler who has come to power has found is that large numbers of human beings are extremely unsuitable. That is why a lot of people die. In some cases tens of millions of people die when the project of constructing a Marxist society is embarked upon. I am obviously not saying that Marx told people to kill. It is just a matter of combining this philosophy with absolute revolutionary power.

The power which socialists want is not the power to be in Downing Street according to the constitution, it is what is described as "workers' power". You take this seriously. I do not. There is no such thing as workers' power. Any power which is exercised is done so by specific people over specific other people. The pretensions about "workers' power" is patter for the gullible.

If the rulers of a society start taking an interest in political theory, god help you, they should not. But if they do, they should read Plato or Rousseau or St Augustine. If they read Marx, get out, trouble is coming. The Marxists, supposedly on behalf of the proletariat, take the power to improve the condition of the poor. This is the promise made by all the Marxist rulers. This has also been betrayed by all the Marxist rulers. Every revolution is betrayed.

An interest in the poor is an unhealthy taste. It may be that the people with an interest in the poor are philanthropic and care sympathetically for these people. If you go through France you often see pictures of St Martin, the French saint who, coming across a poor man who was shivering, gave him half his coat. But it is difficult to imagine Ulyanov doing this. What they would say is that the pain and shivering of the poor is part of the machinery of changing the system.

If it is not a philanthropic and loving interest in the poor, we have to go back to the rather Platonic attitude of Marx. People are understood to be the matter of society. The point, for Marx, is that the proletariat are so far outside of society that they are less marked by the prejudices and illusions of bourgeois society and are therefore the matter out of which the new society will be constructed. The interest in the poor is one of the most significant features of revolutionary parties. These parties are actually looking to exploit the poor.

I am trying to draw out the contradictions of socialism. For example, socialists purport to hate capitalism and to love socialism. In many places, socialist societies have arisen which, despite what Sean Matgamna says, were plausibly

socialist. People defended the socialist sixth of the world with enthusiasm. No one in a capitalist society ever wanted to live in these places. The numbers who want to leave socialist societies for capitalism are very great indeed. The Vietnamese boat people are not trying to leave for China or Cuba. They go to Hong Kong, a great bastion of capitalism.

A Marxist in the West imagines him or herself to be an independent-minded struggler against all the bourgeois illusions which are thrust upon them. The others are lost in false consciousness. The Marxist has the true consciousness. When, however, the revolution actually arrives, the Marxists settle very easily into being apparatchiks. The independence of Marxists, the illusion of courage, comes from the fact that you have the splendid destiny of actually living in a capitalist society.

Another contradiction is notionally the doctrine of the liberation of the proletariat from their working class condition. They will eventually become socialist. If the members of this working class decide they do not want socialism, they are simply abused as traitors to their class. What appears to be liberation is in fact a prison. A proletarian, in Marx's terms, better think proletarian thoughts, supplied for them by the bourgeois Marx. There is an attitude of imprisonment inside the pretence of liberation.

A further contradiction: Marx's theory deplors the supposedly atomised condition of people living in capitalist society. The notion is that we are all so cut off from each other that we are all selfishly grabbing for our own benefits in a rat race. Now, it turns out that after what Sean Matgamna calls the "Stalinist system" that these collectivist systems atomise far more thoroughly than anything conceivable under capitalism. There are so many informers and secret police that people are afraid to talk freely. All institutions of civil society — trade unions, churches and so on — have to be instruments of the one single system of socialism. Socialism is unity or solidarity.

Finally, revolutionary Marxist doctrine is for the moment dead, although I can see many forms of socialism and collectivism coming up on the horizon. I am reminded of a story Arthur Koestler tells in his autobiography. It is from his communist days in 1942. He was working in Germany for a communist newspaper in danger of being closed down by the Nazis. He says they used to tell the story of a Chinese executioner whose duty it was to cut off people's heads. He was a perfectionist whose dream in life was to cut off a head so perfectly that the person would not realise it had happened. Years passed. One day a prisoner said: when are you going to do it? The executioner smiled and said: just kindly nod. Koestler said they used to say to each other: just kindly nod. That is my message to you socialists.

Kenneth Minogue sums up

There is a lot of trying to make water run up hill in your socialist arguments. You say life is pretty dull and dreary in a capitalist factory. That may

well be right. All I can say is that not many people flee from capitalist factories into socialism or socialist countries. A lot of people from other countries and other systems try to get in. The problem the capitalist system has is not people fleeing from the horrors of it, but trying to keep people out who want to get in.

One speaker talked about mass movements for struggle and liberation. The biggest mass movements are movements of immigration of individuals moving from situations they hate to situations they prefer. Often they have illusions, but by and large America, that hated dollar sign of capitalism, is an immense success story. Again, the problem is not that people want to get out, but that people are trying to get into it. The lady who said "as long as we're oppressed we will fight and struggle" will find struggling doesn't really get you anywhere. If you imagine you are in a class war then I suppose you engage in the things called fighting and struggling. But fighting and struggling is a metaphor. What you are actually doing is sitting around here, listening to me, or each other, or other people. You're not actually out there doing any real fighting. You may occasionally go on a demo. But you largely live in a fantasy world, describing what you do in terms of military metaphors. It would be even worse if you actually did it, because it wouldn't produce anything.

Out there in the world, there is an economic system. I hate the word "system" because it is extremely misleading in many ways, but whatever happens, 55 million Britons are

producing buildings, food, beer, vast numbers of things. That is presumably helping somebody to do something. Whether fighting helps them to do anything is another question.

The chap who suggested I misrepresented Marx said Marx was a terrific individualist. The question then becomes no longer what is socialism, but what is individualism? A lady said it would be nice if everybody could go to the opera and Covent Garden. Most people would be bored stiff by the opera. And to sit in the library at the LSE, I imagine, would not be a madly popular option either, except for those poor cripples like myself who have a taste for that sort of thing. The notion of individualism involved here is simply that people have a lot of wants. You might call it consumer socialism — an idea that the future will be for everybody what an inhabitant of Mayfair with two houses in the country now lives. That's not anybody's very serious conception of the future.

A socialist conception of human beings, as I understand it, is an organismic one. A man said that Marx believed that there was a human nature — people need food, they need shelter. Of course, Marx certainly agreed that human beings are organisms. The contrary view which, in fact, derives from Christianity, however remote it may be from the theology, is that life is a challenge. It includes what some economists call positional goods. In other words, it includes quite a lot of things which logically cannot be universalised. The things called capitalist privileges cannot be given to everyone, because to some extent they result from competition, and in competition some people win and some people lose. The good thing about capitalism is that it is so extensively pluralistic that some people winning in one direction are losing in terms of

some other set of values.

I think death is quite an important thing to think about in this context. I would emphasise that what I am concerned with is states not in war, and the instance of the Gulf War seems to raise quite separate issues. The question here is what kind of society people want. Adolf Hitler wanted a racially pure society, and he was a collectivist, exactly like Stalin. The image you have of people is of great masses; collectivists even talk of elites and masses. The word masses is a contemptuous expression, I take it. It indicates a lot of people who have no significance except that an awful lot of them have weight.

Any collectivist view of that kind seems to me to dispose people who also are in the situation of having a lot of power over them to move very rapidly to the view that you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs — and people who have a lot of power have a very strong disposition to make omelettes. As they say in Moscow these days it's easy enough to turn an aquarium into a fish soup, anybody can do that, the real trick is how you turn a fish soup back into an aquarium.

Sean Matgamna sums up

Mr Minogue says it is fantasy to talk about “fighting” and “struggle”. But Mr Minogue is fighting the class struggle in one way, and on behalf of people who fight the class struggle in many other ways. For example, Mr Minogue is on the same side as the police who fought the class struggle with batons in their hands against the miners in events like the Battle of Orgreave in 1984. There's a continuing battle. I don't want to insist on this or that metaphor, although I think the battle metaphor is a very accurate one that sums up a lot of things. But Mr Minogue's criticism strikes me as essentially obtuse. I'm sure Mr Minogue knows what he is doing here — fighting a battle of ideas. He might not like the metaphor, but that is what he is doing, describe it as he may.

If I were to accept his picture of socialism, if I accepted the picture of socialism as the ant-hill society (as somebody called it) then I would certainly be anti-socialist. Even if you are rather badly off in this society, would you prefer to be a well-fed ant? Leon Trotsky, when he was a lad aged about 17, before he became a Marxist, was a Populist. In his biography of Trotsky, Isaac Deutscher talked about a scene where Trotsky denounces Marxism as a dry, economic, inhuman doctrine which he hates. If that's what we are talking about, then I can understand the point of view of the other side.

But it's not what we are talking about! We are talking about changing the fundamental framework of social life. We're not talking about regimenting social life, we're not trying to reduce human beings into so much input of food or electricity, or whatever. We are talking about changing the basis of life from one where individual development, individual liberty, intellectual development, and so on, are the privilege of a minority. We're in favour of individualism. We want more individualism. We want all the people — all the working

class — to have the chance to develop as individuals. We advocate a different arrangement of fundamentals in society to allow that to happen. We locate the reason why capitalist society has immense potential for doing the sort of things we want — many of which capitalism itself originally proclaimed — but doesn't do what we want, in the contradiction between the social means of production and their private ownership by capitalists, and all that follows from that in the way of keeping the workers down and exploiting them. We are for the development of individuals. We see the road to that as being the destruction of the system we live in, in which individual development is reserved for a very small minority.

Now, Hitler, Nasser, Ben-Gurion and Clement Attlee were all “socialists”. So “socialist” is rather a meaningless term. But our definition of socialism is the Marxist definition. Marx's analysis of socialist possibilities within capitalist society indicated that socialism comes after advanced capitalism, and was impossible in conditions like Russia. We can use two ways of judging alleged socialism: against what Marx argued, and by what the working class experienced in the alleged socialism. On those two fundamental criteria, Stalinist “socialism” was simply not socialism at all. It was not socialist according to the Marxist premises which pre-date the modern labour movement, and pre-date the Russian revolution, and it was not socialist according to the way it treated the people.

This seems to me to be a fair way of dealing with this question. We are not people who were, yesterday or the day before, pro-Stalinist, then suddenly discovered that Stalinism has failed, that it was only an alternative form of exploitation, and concluded that we should adapt to the bourgeois form of exploitation. We are the continuators of a political tradition that fought Stalinism all the way through its history. In fact, we fought Stalinism when the bourgeoisie lauded Stalinism, when “Uncle Joe” (Stalin) was a great favourite of papers like the Daily Express, when Hollywood was making movies such as *Mission to Moscow* glorifying the Moscow Trials.

As for Mr Minogue's argument about death — I don't think Marxism believed that human beings are so many battery hens, which is how I vulgarise what I heard Mr Minogue say. You can argue that human life is fundamentally tragic. We are leaves on the biological tree. We will cease to exist very quickly, all too quickly, and we become conscious of the reality that our lives are fundamentally tragic. But what do you conclude from that? Do you conclude that nothing is of any importance? If you are religious, you may think that nothing is of any importance except preparing for the future life. But if you are not religious, what do you say? What you do say if you're a reasonable being is that you make this life better, not just better in the sense of better for yourself, but better for human beings in general. You transform this life. That seems to me to be what Marxism says about how we relate to death.

If you read Victor Serge's account of the way the Cheka behaved, the way they massacred people, then during the Russian revolution — at a certain stage of the bloody, brutal civil war, and the wars of intervention — you could say

that such state organs as the Cheka became death obsessed. If we do say that, we must do it critically, and look at what created the atmosphere in which they could slaughter people so casually or recklessly. It was created by the bourgeoisie in World War I.

Right now, almost 75 years ago, the Battle of the Somme was coming to an end. In the Battle of the Somme around three-quarters of a million people were killed. Germans, French, English and others were killed fighting for a few hundred bloody yards of land. Wave after wave of them were sent to their deaths by the savages who ruled Germany and England. That situation and the culture extrapolated from it and many similar things was not created by the Bolsheviks. If you believe they became infected by it, then they caught an infection from the bourgeoisie. Another example, personally close to me, Ireland. In the middle of the last century the British ruling class saw famine in Ireland and were pleased at the thinning-out of the population. The Times newspaper, watching a million people starve to death while the bourgeoisie exported food, could write that soon the native Irish would be as scarce on the banks of the River Shannon as a Red Indian on the banks of the Hudson River in New York. They let a million people starve to death. Where do the people who defend this system get the right to talk about socialist bloodlust? The first great massacre in relation to a communist revolution didn't involve communists murdering bourgeois. It took place in Paris, after the defeat of the Commune in 1871. Ten to fifteen thousand of our people were murdered in cold blood after the bourgeoisie won.

We want to fight the culture that is death infected.

Capitalism has possibilities which it cannot realise them because of the class structure inseparable from capitalism. Capitalism grew up in the womb of feudalism, and socialism is ripening in the womb of capitalism. Real capitalism now is not thriving individualistic capitalism, but massive monopolies, a concentration of social wealth that is the property of a minority. Socialism is about converting that social wealth into socially owned and controlled property.

In the capitalist world of today, we can already see the outlines of future capitalist conflicts — possibly future capitalist world wars, almost certainly capitalist trade wars. The old way of putting the alternative before humankind — that there is a choice between socialism or barbarism — is still with us. This is the world in which socialist ideas are being renewed. Thank god a large part of the political barbarism on earth — Stalinism — is falling to bits! That is good. We are fighting for a socialist, humane, democratic control of the means of life, which can lead to a tremendous flowering of real, mass human liberty, individualism and self-development. Those who advocate the worship of the established fact, and the “hidden hand” that supposedly guides capitalism are as remote from reason as the devotees of some pagan cult.

The Aztec priests cut out living human hearts for their gods. The Thatcherites in their 12 years of rule have cut out an awful lot of human hearts. They have created mass poverty and barbarised part of a whole generation of young people. We represent the future. The working class cannot be beaten

definitively. The class struggle cannot be contained. It is a necessary part of the capitalist system. While capitalism lives, so does the class struggle and socialism.

The debate between Kenneth Minogue and Sean Matgamna took place at the "Stand Up for Real Socialism" conference sponsored by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty on 2 November 1991.