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WHAT'S WRONG WITH JOHN REDWOOD?



Cover illustration by
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A PAMPHLET BY THE
WOKINGHAM AMATEUR POETRY CLUB

We are *fed up* with Mr. Redwood's face, and the faces of many others, so we have written this small tract.

Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.

Aldous Huxley. *Proper Studies.*

In the text below we have found ourselves obliged to use such terms as 'workers', 'class' and 'capitalism', we realise that a lot of readers, no matter what side of the political circus they may ally themselves with, will baulk at such words. They will accuse us of being out-of-date and simple-minded, for haven't we heard?: all that old tosh has been consigned to the dustbin. Lady Thatcher herself has told us that 'class' no longer exists, some famous historian has proclaimed that 'history' has ended, and Tony Blair has told us that we live in a 'consensus' society. Well, we, poor deluded fools, out of step with everything, we think they are having us on.

one

Fame is a food that dead man eat,-

I have no stomach for such meat.

Austin Dobson. *Fame is a Food.*

John Redwood, the Conservative Party M.P. for Wokingham, the town in which members of our group have lived for over thirty years, has recently published a book. The cover displays a photograph of the author in which he manages to give an impression of good-naturedness and enthusiasm while he relaxes in a confident, and yet coquettish, pose. Under this charming, boyish photograph stands the grim title of the book: "The Death of Britain?" This is as much as we can describe of this literary effort since we have not read the book and are hardly likely to ever want to. We just saw it displayed in a book shop window in the town. For all we know the book could be a sincere wail from the heart about the diminished numbers of songbirds that inhabit these isles, but we doubt it. It's more likely to be some sort of publicity exercise for the career of Mr. Redwood, but we are going out on a limb here, for we haven't even bothered to read any reviews of the book in the press (if there were any), and we have made absolutely

no effort to find out anything about the book. We really have got better things to do, like cutting our toe nails, or removing ear wax.

We do, however, intend to make some limited analysis of the things that Mr. Redwood *represents*, we have no intention of making a personal attack on Mr. Redwood, such a thing would be too tiresome to imagine. *Mr. Redwood is not important*, to his family and friends he may be important, but to the rest of us who have to endure his public face he is just another tiny facet of the spectacle that confronts us daily, the spectacle of politics, the media, wealth and power. Mr. Redwood is nothing special, we have seen him before and we will see him again. His ideas are *dead*, they show no signs of *life*; this is because they are contained within the circus tent of politics and acceptability. The parameters of his actions and words are bound by his being a Member of Parliament and in his grasping for the rigor mortised trophies of power and celebrity. The realm in which Mr. Redwood dons his clown's make-up is the kingdom of the dead. It is the dead who have climbed to the tops of the hills and now look down on us to make sure we don't veer from our allotted path. We even wave happily up to them, through our TV screens, because, after all, they are just like us (except for being dead of course), and they greet us with their painted smiles and speak lies or not, as it suits them, to us through their clenched teeth. These people, these business leaders, rich people, politicians, journalists, police chiefs, government scientists, television personalities and the rest, they have placed their dead kingdom over our lives and it has become very difficult to see if anything else but their global graveyard exists at all. But we mustn't become morbid, they are all, no doubt, having a very good laugh.

So just what is this *death* that we are talking about here? How can we imply that Mr. Redwood, for example, for we don't mean to get personal, inhabits a dead zone? *Him?* with his boyish good looks, renowned sense of humour, and love of cricket? Let us try to explain.

When we speak about death in this context we are speaking of several things, and to emphasise these characteristics of death we have constantly in our minds ideas of what we think that life, creativity and human-ness represent, that is, what we think is the opposite of kingdom of the dead. So, for us, in this context, we will define death as a person or groups' control over others, or power over others.

Leaving aside the condition of those over whom power is wielded, whose fate may well include *actual death* because of it, we are more interested here in those who occupy positions of control (*of others*) and those whose position offers them the opportunity to actively promote the ethos of control and form strategies for the maintenance of that control. We mean people whose working life allows them to be described, for example, as professional, expert and managerial. We also mean the owners of companies. And we also mean politicians of all descriptions. So, this group of people might include at one end the former Labour Party councillor and now M.P. for Reading, Martin Salter, and at the other end the business tycoon, Rupert Murdoch. At one end the manager of the local supermarket and at the other the President of the USA. All these good people are part of the process that ensures that the workers keep working and control does not slip from the grasp of those in charge, even if the faces of those in charge has to change. [When we use the term workers we mean those people who do the actual work of making things, distributing things, keeping things clean and tidy, etc., not those who supervise these actions.]

The wisest people are those who try to increase the amount of pleasure that can be had from life. This does not mean partaking of a hedonistic lifestyle, which reflects more a nervous and twitchy fear of death than a search for genuine enjoyment. It means learning about yourself, and your situation, and others, and their situations, and using that knowledge to free your thought patterns from the dross with which we are bombarded by our elders and betters from an early age. It means, therefore, learning to *think* for yourself. This, however, is more difficult than it might seem, it does not mean just picking up some "oppositional" or left-wing philosophies. Most philosophies or so-called 'radical' politics are well contained by the dominant all-embracing ideology that we see evidence of all around us and for want of a better description we could call: the modern world. The school of Marxism, for example, as taught for decades in our best universities, has turned out some of our most astute capitalist ideologues. Look how 'green' politics is being taken up by major political parties and major companies. Not only is 'green' a sure-fire money spinner, it has all the potential, like Marxism and Labour Movement politics before it, to become another stick with which to beat workers and the worlds' poor.

If we can try to think more for ourselves then we might find that we start doing less of the things that we hate, that instead of trying to keep up appearances we relax, and no longer care what others think, those poor lost vampires who seem desperate for us to be just like them. Of course, these wise people cannot be found in the public arena, although you may find them buried in the recesses of your local library, or you may get glimpses of such people in obscure history books. When we talk of these wise people we do not mean such mega-stars as, for example, Jesus, who seemed to suffer from a messiah complex, or Buddha, who, comfortable in his great wealth, refused to understand how the world really worked, or the place he occupied in it.

The stupidest people are those who try to control other people, for in their fight to deny freedom to others they lose whatever inner freedom they themselves might have had. Now Mr. Redwood, we imagine, would thoroughly and adamantly deny that his aim had anything to do with controlling people or denying their freedom. We can see him in a tight fitting lycra ballet costume, pirouetting and pouting in utter disbelief that anyone could suggest such a thing before turning serious and perhaps a little bit menacing. Pointing his finger, he would argue that his aim was, in fact, to make everyone *freer* by trying to fiddle with the economy and creating more opportunities for those that had the inclination to seize them. He would, of course, admit that, yes, there are some people who, for whatever personal failing they might have, will never be able to grasp the golden maggots of "opportunity". But that is the way society is, and that is the way people will always be. You can't do anything about human nature, some people will always rise to the top and the majority will prefer to be bled, sorry, we meant *led*. After all, if we didn't have dynamic business leaders forging ahead, creating jobs, taking risks, struggling to survive, then where would humanity be? Stuck in an economic quagmire, too lazy and despondent to get out of bed in the morning, wading around in our own filth and our own lack of imagination. Yes, there are winners and losers, but the more winners there are then the less losers there will be. It's quite simple. But, of course, we need to keep society running in such a way that the winners can keep winning and the losers can keep losing. Was it Jesus who once said, "The poor will always be with us"? Just like Mr. Redwood, Jesus must have identified himself with the winners in society.

two

The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.

Anatole France. Cournos, *Modern Plutarch*.

But this freedom that the likes of Mr. Redwood and all of his kind like to say they have handed to us is the sort of freedom that the National Lottery gives us: a freedom for the odd token individual (it would be madly paranoiac to say so, but the notion surely comes to mind that the National Lottery might be another small ploy to keep us all in line, so we won't suggest it). The freedom to say I could be rich and successful if only I picked the right numbers; if only I'd been born into the right family; if only I'd gone to the right school; if only I knew the right people; if only I could be picked out of the herd and given the star treatment by those on high who decide our fates. Oh, Lords of Camelot, we pray to your heavenly souls each night that you may see fit one day to visit upon us your divine love through the intervention of your most holy angel, Simon Mayo (or some other flunky), on a Saturday evening soon. After all our commitments to survival and maintaining a reasonable distance from the gutter we are left with the freedom to dream endlessly and fruitlessly of winning the lottery.

Under the guise of offering freedom Mr. Redwood offers us nothing but servitude. (Even the National Lottery is little more than another tax). We must serve the economy, and we must do this not only for the benefit of our employers, our political leaders and The British Nation, we must do it for ourselves. For more than simply earning enough money to live in a degree of comfort, we must do it for the feeling of self-worth that contributing to the economy imparts.

But what about the unemployed? Well, of course, they are helped to feel guilty about their position, and the great and the good are constantly looking for ways to save these poor souls from the dole queues and lead them to some sort of meaningful existence. Or are they? Up in his tree house, late at night, dressed in a Robin Hood outfit, from where he catapults snails into his neighbours' gardens, we can imagine Mr. Redwood musing to himself that the unemployed are really quite essential to the smooth running of an economy. A reserve of the unemployed helps keep people in jobs from asking for too high a pay rise, and if

new jobs are created by some thrusting global enterprise then they help keep the wages lower than they would have to be if the company was forced to entice people from existing employment. Years of massive unemployment has been extremely good for British business, it has made the workforce amenable to more flexible ways of working, and the new compliancy of the British workforce has attracted back business investment. At the same time as this, we see a distinct *lack of compliance* in South East Asian countries on the part of the workers, which is another reason why industry is fleeing from these areas just as it once did from Britain. As he sends another snail onto the roof of his neighbour's house, Robin Hood smirks in an extremely engaging way, the unemployed should be licked and caressed for their efforts.

No, Mr. Redwood, despite what he might say, is not a man who offers anything but *more of the same*, he is trying to keep this country much as it is and is endlessly looking for ways to strengthen his position and the position of others of his ilk in this society. We imagine that late at night he wakes in a fevered sweat having dreamt about losing control of everything and being swept away by a tidal wave of the great unwashed, we imagine that the left-wing Labour MP, Dennis Skinner, has the same dreams. Grasping, manic fear and a suspicion that your heart has become small and mean can affect a sleeper worse than a large piece of Stilton at bedtime.

three

"Oh no," we can hear some readers cry, "You can't put the likes of Dennis Skinner in with the likes of John Redwood! They are from opposite ends of the political spectrum! Dennis Skinner exudes a rough sort of sexual charisma while John Redwood emanates almost cherubic sexual mischievousness. Dennis Skinner is this sort of bloke while John Redwood is that sort of bloke. Their teeth are different." The list could go on, right down to the size of their houses, but it is not their small differences that concern us here, it is what unites them. Both of these good fellows are Members of Parliament. This means that they both perform for our general entertainment the monotonous two-step of the dance of Democracy.

Our great political system, the political system that seeks to eradicate all other systems, is an ally of our economic system, capitalism, which seeks to eradicate

all other ways of *living*. Capitalism is a global economic system which, for almost all of humanity, has turned planet Earth into a *labour camp*. Democracy is the political wing *par excellence* of the economic system known as capitalism. All the most economically successful countries use democracy as their political system, this is because, as astute advertising people might say: **Democracy Washes Whitest.**

Democracy is a spectator sport, like football. We pay our money at the gate (taxes and all the money we make for our bosses), and we enter a world which, although we have all paid for it, we do not own. We support one side or another, as if that really affected the game. We talk about "our" team, when the team is not "ours" at all. The team does what it likes, without reference to the people who pay for it to exist.

Well, that's not entirely true, the team will always defer to its major sponsors, the big companies who have invested in the team for advertising purposes. And let's not forget the major shareholders in the club, whose aim is to make a profit from their involvement. It is these corporate "fans" and these big shareholders who decide what the club does. It would be against their interests for the ordinary fans, who collectively make by far the largest single contribution to the club's finances, to have any real say in what goes on in the decision-making rooms of the club. Of course, the importance of the fans cannot always be ignored and so occasionally a club will let a Supporters Group have some limited and token say in things, but this will usually only have happened after a bitter struggle between fans and owners. It will soon become simply a way for fans to let off steam and therefore serves as a useful controlling device for the owners. We all know that the only real way that fans can make themselves heard is by stopping going to the games (going on strike) or by organising mass demonstrations that "get out of hand". The similarities with the political system known as democracy and the way the spectator sport of football is run throughout the world is, for us, as fans of Wokingham Town F.C., startling.

So, we voters, the electorate, have as little say in the way the government behaves as lowly football fans do for their favoured club. Other, more powerful minorities control both institutions. And the game of football is like a snapshot of the process of democracy in general. A spectator sport where we really can only

spectate, where instead of charging out onto the pitch, seizing the ball for ourselves and having our own game (or at least choosing our own players), we are encouraged to cheer or boo harmlessly from our seats in the terraces. And if we climb out of our seats we could be arrested. In democracy we cheer (vote for) or boo (not vote for) this party or that party and if one wins or one loses there is never any real difference made to our daily lives. It's all a bit hollow at the end of it all (the end of the season, or the end of the election), and we thought that this time we'd be happy for ever.

Just as in football, when occasionally the club is forced by direct action to listen to the fans, so too the government sometimes has to listen to ordinary people. But for this to happen people have to get together *en masse*, they have to go on strike from their workplaces, or they have to make themselves felt in other ways. The most recent big example of this sort of thing happening in Britain was the anti-Poll Tax riot in Trafalgar Square in 1990, this riot put the lid on the coffin of the Poll Tax, the riot had such an effect that plans to introduce a poll tax in Queensland, Australia, were dropped because of it. Of course, the hastily introduced Council Tax, managed to recoup any losses that the fiasco of the Poll Tax might have caused, but that is not the issue here. What we find *interesting* is that although democracy is supposed to give everyone a say, when people really do want to say anything they are forced to go out on the streets and fight the police. We might think that the recent riots in Malaysia, for example, are not the sort of thing that could happen here, but we only have to look at recent events like the miners strike, the printers lock-out, the riots across Britain in the early and mid-1980's, as well as the poll tax riot, and some more recent disturbances, to see that things sometimes don't look much different here.

four

Riots are the language of the unheard.
Attributed to Martin Luther King.

"But Shirley?" you may ask, even though that is not any of our names, "The good thing about all this democracy and voting is that everyone gets to put their opinion over by voting, and usually this stops the need for any major disturbances on the streets? And anyway, these riots in Britain are only caused by a small minority of

headcases who refuse to put their complaints through the proper channels and therefore hold the whole country up to ransom." We, of course, as amateur poets, would have to reply that voting and democracy do indeed seem to diffuse a lot of collective anger but this is because, in a happy coincidence for our superiors, the 'proper channels' are time-consuming, costly and *draining*. The truth is that voting has very little effect on anything, and the democratic process is, for all its fanfaring of egalitarianism, weighted against those without money or privilege. Whoever you vote for, the government always gets in. The government is like the board of a football club, it listens not to the fans, unless they start ripping up the seats, but to its major shareholders and sponsors. If the board does act contrary to the wishes of the people with the money then ways will be found of ousting the board or making them tow the line. The same goes for governments.

In the greatest democracy in the world, the USA, it is usually the case that barely fifty percent of the electorate bothers to vote in even the highest profile elections. It is no different in the UK, look at the hilarious numbers of votes for the Welsh Parliament, or the recent European Elections, etc. The people who don't bother voting, who have such a *lack of interest*, seem to us to have a kind of intuitive knowledge of what the government represents and how the difference between one party and another is no difference at all. They seem to be expressing a perhaps subconscious knowledge of their position in society and an insight into the machinations and chicanery of this democratic swindle. There is far more innate intelligence here than can be seen issuing from the mouths of those people who utter such nonsense as: "You can't complain about the government if you don't vote", or, "You have to stand up and be counted, and voting is your way of doing this". They might be called apathetic by righteous-feeling voters, but at least they don't make themselves look like fools by turning up at polling stations on election days. Many of those who bemoan the fact that so few people vote would argue that if more people voted then we would see a difference in the political climate in Britain. But if this was the case then surely we could discern a qualitative superiority in the political life of Australia, for example, where it is illegal not to vote. The truth is, or nearly!, we could have ten people and a dog going to the polls and Britain would still call itself a democracy, and everything would be just as it is now.

It could, of course, be admitted by apologists for democracy that there is indeed not a great deal of difference between the major parties, especially when they are in power, but it is this very similarity in their political outlook that is the wonderful thing. Britain, on the whole, is run by sensible and reasonable people, and because of this we can let them get on with running the country while we just keep an eye on what's going on. If we are to briefly explore this line of thought then we must ask where all this good common sense comes from. Many people would say that a lot of it comes from the mythical British psyche, you know: fair play and all that. In fact, this apparent good sense, comes from a knowledge of history and an awareness of how far one can go before the masses start revolting. The real social history of these isles is one of continual conflict between the ruling classes struggle for more wealth and more power and the working classes' struggle to improve its collective lot or resist attacks on its conditions. The government acts as a pretend mediator in this grim game, but we mustn't be in any doubt that the government is on the side of wealth and power.

It is well recognised by the great and the good that the most significant threat to the position of governments and ruling classes comes not from some foreign power but from its own citizens. Armies around the world are maintained less to repel foreign invasion than to quell internal unrest should it arise. And bodies such as the United Nations are there mainly to quell internal unrest in countries in which the ruling classes have lost control. All this is, in fact, one of those 'open secrets', well recognised and documented by the State, but never admitted or brought up in idle conversation on *Newsnight*. And as for us doe-eyed little folk, well, we could never believe such things in a million years!

So, one reason the government of Britain seems so sensible is because it knows about history and it knows where the limits of its power are (but not always, of course). In the last few years in Britain we have seen relative calm in social relations between those who rule and those who work. But we mustn't forget that this is a direct result of the conflicts that occurred during the 1970's and 1980's. During the 1970's there were so many strikes in so many different sections of the economy that striking was known at home and abroad as "the British Disease". In 1974 the miners brought down the government of Edward Heath, and by the end of the seventies a combination of pay demands, along with the "oil crisis", had crippled the Labour government.

In 1984 the miners at last got their reward for their impudence, and the mining industry began to be shut down, it was too risky to have such a powerful section of the working class (powerful because of their numbers and the fact that they worked on such an important resource for the economy) at large in the country, it was better to move to other, or foreign, fuel sources. We also saw the massive unemployment we talked about above and therefore the eventual crushing of militancy at British workplaces. The government who helped all this to happen was a maverick and brave one, it took some big risks, but its ire and hatred were up and they won through. Tony Blair is now reaping the benefits of Lady Thatcher's administration, and he knows it. But this "peace" is not going to last for many more years, things will one day be again like they were in the 1970's, and perhaps more extreme.

five

"Don Ramon, it's people like that who make revolutions. The riffraff begin the job, the parliaments finish it."

"... by finishing off the riffraff," said Don Ramon.

Victor Serge. The Birth Of Our Power.

If democracy is such a mockery of a sham of a mockery of a sham then why is it that around the world, in countries not bestowed with a full democratic system, we often see reports of rampaging mobs clamouring for democracy? Surely, having analysed the political and economic system of Western Europe and the USA, for example, you would think that since democracy is plainly no guarantee against poverty or the development of rich and powerful cliques, then these troublemakers would have decided that something a little better than democracy was needed? To understand why such people as, most recently, Iranian university students, would want to institute a political system that favoured a massively unequal distribution of wealth, we have to look at who the main backers of such a pro-democracy movement invariably are.

First of all we have to understand that pro-democracy movements in general only gain their greatest momentum when *the workers* come out in support of it (not the students or the politicians, or the oppositional business leaders but the *supervised*

people who actually make things, distribute things and other workers, and those who do the actual work of keeping things clean and tidy and functioning). Mass mobilisations and *strikes* are the key to making any fundamental change to any political system. When the economy stops functioning adequately things get decidedly uncertain. This is a dangerous time not only for the old establishment but also for the new pretenders because if things remain unresolved for too long then the workers may just decide to start organising things themselves. And that would be a calamity!

At this point the new power has to argue, or show, that it is the only power now capable of controlling the workers and getting them back to work, when the old power realises this then it will give way. Both old and new guards know full well that, in the end, the most important thing is that a government is created that regains a good grip on the reins of the workers, these folk who are having a taste of freedom and a taste of their own power while they occupy the streets and workplaces. For if all potential governments lose control then the workers may try to sweep away that entire strata of society who get fat on their daily toil.

Now, the reason that the workers join the pro-democracy movement in the first place is due mainly to the shaky nature of the countries' economy, under capitalism the totalitarian option for political control is never a permanent one. [The longest lasting dictatorships are those that are sponsored by a foreign power. Since the demise of the Eastern Bloc the award for sponsoring the most amount of misery and murder under dictatorial regimes goes to our friends who make up the ruling class of the USA, their good work can be witnessed throughout the Middle East, Africa, and particularly, Central and South America.] Workers get fed up of the extreme austerity and precariousness of their daily lives and start taking industrial action, and then along come the pro-democracy people and they put it to the workers that if they help get their new political system established then things will be a lot more rosy. So the workers join forces with students, the intelligentsia, politicians and business leaders and call for democracy.

Of course, the reason a large proportion of the business community would want democracy is because it would sweep away the old restrictive practices and nepotism that goes hand in hand with running a dictatorship, capitalism (the free market) never functions that well under a totalitarian regime. The politicians want

democracy because they want to get into positions of power in the political arena, and this usually helps with any financial worries that they might have. The intelligentsia also want to be able to be able to speak freely and make a pile of money from publishing their work, getting top university and media posts and making appearances on television. Students want democracy and a freeing up of the economy because they want to get good jobs and have a comfortable lifestyle, as befits a graduate (the whole point of being a university student is that you are able to attain a professional, expert or managerial post afterwards). None of the above have any intention of altering the role of the working class, apart, of course, from making them a lot more *productive*.

six

*And the Devil did grin, for his darling sin
Is pride that apes humility.*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *The Devil's Thoughts*.

After all this we seem to have lost sight of our heroes, Mr. Skinner and Mr. Redwood. Oh no, over there in the sunshine, there they are, running joyously over the brow of a green hill, playful and naked and holding hands. Maybe they are skipping back to their cars before driving down to the Houses of Parliament for an afternoon's work?

Dennis Skinner is often seen as part of the old guard of the Labour Party. Many, of course, think that old fashioned Labour was a good thing and that the present party has betrayed its roots and spits daily on the grave of its old luminaries. But the old gangsters were as much champagne socialists as the new gangsters are. The entire Labour Party was built on a certain naiveté on the part of the working class who voted for it (who are no more naive than working class Tory voters) and gallons of champagne paid for through Union subscriptions. The Labour Party was set up at the beginning of this century by the leaders of the Trades Unions who wanted to have a voice in Parliament. The unions are another organisation, like the political system itself, which seeks to remove any power from the collective mass of the workers and place it into the hands of elected officials. It is well known these days that the unions cater for their own interests rather than the interests of the members, the unions' main job has always been to

restrain workers and keep them in the dark. Mr. Skinner is probably sponsored by some Union so he'll know what sort of job he has to do. But even if the union has no control over him he'll still fulfil his function as a democratically elected Member of Parliament, that is, for our entertainment he'll be Skinner United F.C. playing against Redwood City F.C., performing on that great pitch at Westminster.

seven

Why should I let the toad work

Squat on my life?

Philip Larkin. *Toads.*

We at our little poetry circle meetings often wonder why people show such a lack of dignity by voting for someone or other to have power over them, happily letting others make the big decisions for us. We wonder the same about why we go to work. Unfortunately, of course, we are, by-and-large, *forced* to go to work. [When we talk about work here we mean paid labour: labour for others; or the labour that the self-employed do in this and previous societies or economies.] In French the word for work is *travail*, which comes from the 'tripalium', an instrument of torture, *labor* means suffering. In medieval times, the nobility who coined these words for daily toil had no illusions about what work was, and this is why they refused to do any. Work for them was slavery and a way of keeping discipline, it kept the poor, who, to them, were little more than farm animals, busy. No one who had any dignity, they reasoned, would submit themselves to an existence that was little better than that led by an ox. The nobility's, and royalty's, quite sensible hatred of work has lived on of course, but these days they have to hide it and pretend that they do do work, even if it is only charity work. The reason for this subterfuge is that since the rise of the mercantile and capitalist classes work and productivity has become the bedrock for a whole philosophical system. The early European merchants who promoted the idea of work as a good thing did this in response to the nobility's disgust for their common wheeler-dealing and because the nobility would not let them into their exalted circles of influence and power. But the days of the nobility's absolute power were numbered, simply because these new merchants were making such a lot of money and forming such powerful interest groups. The merchants not only wanted to

justify their own toil (limited as it might be once successful however) in the face of the nobles' hostility, but they wanted to create a society where the idea of work was a positive thing at every level.

Since merchants and early employers had to *hire* people (they couldn't just enserf or enslave because they didn't own small armies) they wanted to squash any idea that work was slavery or something degrading, they wanted to show that it was, in fact, something that made people more dignified. A lot of the ordinary folk, however, were not that stupid, and although these clear thinkers despised the nobility, they did understand that working for others (as a serf or a wage labourer) was demeaning. During the English civil war, or revolution, of the 1640's and 1650's, a group of poor people known as the Diggers occupied a piece of common land on St. George's Hill in Surrey. They thought that instead of people working for *others* everyone should work for themselves, *collectively*, for the whole community and as equals. They said: "He that works for another, either for wages or to pay rent, works unrighteously". But their common sense competed with a dynamic new ideology of work that we still hold in our hearts today, for want of a better title: the Protestant Work Ethic. [One reason that Protestantism did so well as an alternative ideology to Catholicism was that it could be so easily adapted by the new business class to their own interests.]

The basic philosophy of the Protestant Work Ethic was a strong element in the ideology of the Levellers in the civil war, the first organised democrats in history since the Ancient Greeks had toyed around with the idea. The Levellers most fundamental aim, allied, of course, to their plan for a form of parliamentary domination of the masses, was free competition in the economy, this would mean that the old power of the nobility, and all its restrictions on the rising Protestant bourgeoisie, would be abolished. It was to be a world where the old feudal principle of domination was replaced by productivity, the new masters did not need to *dominate* in the old way, they just needed to be able to *exploit*. They didn't succeed at once of course, but they paved the way for the society we now find ourselves in, a society that praises hard work and pats them on the back who keep their noses firmly to the grindstone, or, at any rate, *appear to*.

Even your fellow workers, who you might have given up as braindead automatons because they seem to love work and say they don't mind it at all, give themselves

away by their actions, or rather, inaction's, their skiving, and the odd unguarded look or word. You can work for years in a place and never murmur an objection, but if you find yourself out on strike you are immediately labelled a greedy no-good and an idle troublemaker. The rich are rarely brought to book for their idleness (although they may keep busy with parties, functions, speculation, politics, travelling or sport) because we all know that only a fool would work if he didn't have to. It's another one of those open secrets. *Doing things* (growing things, making things, distributing things, helping people, etc) is fine, but work, *paid labour*, the very basis of the social and economic life of the whole planet, is *rubbish*. Ask any nurse, for example, who joined up because they wanted to do something intrinsically 'good' and interesting. Out of a five day week most of us work about the first two days for ourselves (i.e., make our wages), and the rest of the week for the company that employs us. What a bargain! We humble amateur poets can't stop laughing, and we bet our bosses can't either. No wonder it's called wage slavery.

But we shouldn't complain too much, things are pretty good in this country these days, especially compared with the general poverty before the Second World War, and compared with other countries in the world. We shouldn't upset the apple-cart, we shouldn't behave like bulls in a china shop, we shouldn't ask for more than we get already.....

eight

Before the Second World War times were indeed harder, economically, for a far larger proportion of the Western population than they are now. This was because the economy of the West had not yet become a predominantly consumer oriented one. Before the war heavy industry and colonialism were still the biggest money spinners for the great and the good, but after the war light industry and the manufacture of consumer products gained the high ground.

The reason for this is that under capitalism business enterprises have to expand or they begin to wither and die in the face of competition. Geographically the capitalist economy (under the political umbrella of colonialism) had pretty well covered the entire globe by the 1920's, so there were no new markets to exploit through geographical expansion. Also by this time heavy industries like steel-

making and mining had reached a plateau and their rates of growth had slowed down considerably (the oil industry was still expanding however). Of course in these situations it is usually only war that can get the economy going again, which, of course, means that war is an exceptionally good money spinner and investment for the rich. But the economy, or rather, sections of the capitalist class (those people who own big companies), had a another neat trick up their sleeves. They decided that instead of trying to always expand in an outward way they had to expand in *depth*.

Poor people, that is, most of the population, had always made the owners and bosses of businesses who make foodstuffs and the basic necessities for living a good pile of cash, what if you could make a lot more things for them to buy? Things like household appliances, more transportation devices, etc etc. The problem was though that people on their present rates of pay would not be able to afford such things, these new consumer products had to be affordable somehow. This was solved in several ways, first of all more people had to be employed to actually make these new products, and this raised the general level of affluence, especially since there turned out to be a shortage of workers, which drove pay levels up because firms had to compete with each other for workers. One way this problem was alleviated was by encouraging workers from other countries, colonies for example, to come and get jobs. Another way was by offering goods on hire purchase which, by a stroke of genius, actually meant people paid more for the item! Yes, people were able to have the appliance, or whatever, *before* they had paid for it, but we have to remember that if people had had to *save up* to buy the appliance then much fewer would have been sold and profits would have been meagre.

nine

One of the greatest products of this era of capitalist development was the motor car. We don't harbour any ill feeling toward the motor car like many rebellious young things do these days. The motor car is just a thing, and to blame simple objects for the poverty of your existence is as absurd as blaming the hammer that strikes your finger for your misfortune. You could muse that if hammers had not been invented then you would never have hurt your finger, but this way, dear reader, madness lies. If you *really* hate the motor car then don't use it. So, while

the motor car itself is innocent of all charges we can see that as an actual product and in its development as a tool in the social organisation of workers the motor car has proved very useful for the powers that be.

The global car industry is a key manufacturing enterprise in the global economy. The almost pivotal position of the industry makes car workers potentially very strong, that is, it makes them a big threat to their bosses and the economy in general. Some of the most important labour disputes in this century have been centred at car factories. It was, for example, Renault workers in France who made the May uprising of 1968 so frightening for President Charles de Gaulle that he fled the country. And there is plenty of evidence down the decades of the fear with which car workers are held by the bosses and the State in the West. The first automated assembly lines were introduced in Fiat in Italy in the 1970's. Many would say that automation happened in the car industry at that particular time because the technology was only developed then. These people would say that technology is "innocent" and neutral, and that scientists are just a bunch of long-haired boffins who research things with little regard to the machinations of the outside world, who may of course misuse their inventions and new technologies. (This must surely be what happened to those nice scientists who invented the nuclear bomb, or those wide-eyed cherubs who have developed genetically modified food crops.) But back to Fiat. The real reason Fiat introduced automation was because the company had suffered years of industrial unrest and the situation had got so bad that it was sometimes difficult to tell who ran the factories, the workers or the bosses. This state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue, discipline must be enforced on workers, so the plan was to get rid of a massive proportion of workers and replace them with robots. This way control was re-established by the bosses, the value of the company shot back up, and unemployment is still high in cities like Turin (and unemployment, if you remember, is a great tool for keeping the remaining workers in line).

Apart from this part of the story of "the car", we also have the factors that have made the car one of the most useful products for the development of capitalist society in the second half of this century. The car has enabled workers to travel much further to work, and to more out of the way places, so it has made the workforce more flexible. Companies can set up in cheap-rent industrial parks in the middle of nowhere and still have no trouble attracting workers who live

twenty miles away, for example. The car has helped with the dispersal of workers in that many workers in a single street will actually work in different towns, the less workers have in common with each other the less likely they are to get together and complain about the conditions of their existence. The car has also proved essential for the development of the leisure industry in all its forms. The car, through no fault of its own of course, has been used to help develop other sectors of the economy, for example, out of town supermarkets, to saturation point.

The reason road transportation in general is such a strong aspect of the global economy is due not to some 'natural' historical progress but to the power of the bosses and owners of the motor companies. Having made so much money means that motor companies (not the workers) have the ear of governments and their planners (to put it mildly!). If there is ever to be a genuine change in transportation policies under the present economy it will only be because the motor manufacturers (a strange word, it doesn't mean the people who *actually make* the cars and trucks, but their *bosses* - the ones who get all the credit and all the money) have decided that their survival is under threat from economic competition and serious diversification is needed.

ten

In the later decades of this century we have seen a further deepening of capitalist expansion, that is, into the areas of leisure and youth, and most recently, old age. Capitalist economics demands that businesses expand or die so we have seen massive developments in the consumption of leisure and style. The "teenager" was invented by the same scaly entrepreneurs who crafted the post-Second World War economy in America and Europe. A couple of decades ago it was constantly being predicted that we were entering 'the leisure society', we would all be working less and devoting more time to leisure pursuits. Some people, of course, have ended up not working at all, but they are not able to enjoy a lifestyle of 'leisure'. Those in work have often found their working hours lengthened, certainly not significantly reduced. As for leisure pursuits it seems that what has transpired is a frenetic quest for beauty, fitness and health. As usual, the truth about beauty, fitness and health is that it's just another money-making racket.

We have had extra time given to us in that a lot of the household labour-saving devices that we now use do allow us to do other things than constantly wash and clean, and the car and supermarkets have saved us a lot of time. But the magic of this is that we now spend more money on products to use while we 'relax' in the evening and at weekends. Television is, of course, still the leader in this market, but computer games and information technology are fast catching up. All these 'leisure' activities are *passive* pastimes: we happily pay money to do nothing. We don't achieve anything by them, we don't create anything. We simply spectate, and spectate and spectate. And we do it on our own, isolated from real living people. Of course, we mustn't forget the DIY craze that seems to have swept the country. On the face of it this looks like an *active* entertainment, where people do actually *do* things. But despite the occasional feeling of pride on completing some project or other, it seems that the basic elements of DIY are *more shopping* and *more drudgery*, and more arguments. We return to work on Monday for a break from it all.

Our position as spectators is very important to those who make money and those who run the country, if we didn't mainly spectate we would get in their way. If we actually got together and did things that were useful to us we would become a big nuisance, and anyway we have laws to stop us getting under the feet of the great and the good. Whatever you might think of people who get involved in some of these environmental protests (and personally, we think they are generally just a bunch of middle-class layabouts) it is interesting to see how the local and national State reacts to them and how they use the law and the police, that is, how they can't be having with such nuisance-makers upsetting their plans.

The big and the powerful do not want us to escape from our role as spectators, they do not want us, for example to attain any sense of 'community' with the people we live near. Happily for them the way work is organised makes it difficult to get any solidarity amongst local residents. It is very rare indeed to find two people in the same neighbourhood working at the same firm and getting the same wages. This was a major feature of the traditional solidarity of the coal mining communities, the collective power of the workers was enhanced by the fact that they all lived in the same streets. They kept making a nuisance of themselves and in the end they had to be dealt with.

In very poor and run down areas there is sometimes some attempt by the powers that be to create some sort of community spirit, but this is usually in order to cut down crime and it is all carefully watched over by the local bobbies, as much to prevent residents thinking of taking the law into their own hands as anything else.

eleven

To me 'work' is a four-letter word. 'Play' is a much better one.
John Noakes. Interview in *Radio Times*.

We learn how to spectate from an early age, it begins when we have our playfulness slowly knocked out of us. We live in a society that only values 'play' if it is making money or a being used as a kind of training. A child kicking a ball against a wall for hours on end and for no purpose other than because he is enjoying it, will invariably be encouraged to use this 'playtime' for good effect. Instead of just kicking the ball for fun he should try to learn more control of the ball so that he can become good at football and get into a team, he should turn his play into *work*. If he is just kicking a ball against a wall we will have no compunction in interrupting and asking the kid to do an errand for example. But if he is training for the football team we certainly will refrain from interrupting him if we can.

After a few years of this sort of reaction to his play the kid absorbs the attitude and becomes unable to enjoy anything that he doesn't consider useful to his future. Having your play turned into work kills the joy of it, if your life becomes dominated by the philosophy of *work* then you begin to find it difficult to enjoy *anything*. So the kid stops playing with the football because the fun has gone out of it and he has not managed to get into the football team anyway. For the same reason he stops making music with the flute that he got one birthday, and he doesn't enjoy art lessons at school anymore. He finds it a lot more satisfying, that is, *easier*, to spectate. Instead of *doing things* he watches the professionals playing football; the professional musicians; the professional story-tellers; he goes to art galleries and *looks* at things. He wishes he had some creative talent, but he was obviously born without any. He is too far from childhood to remember the massive spark of creative genius he once had, the same spark that everyone snuffed out in him.

The development of the economy has laid all the groundwork for our existence as spectators. We have no control over the areas in which we live, the council and the police have ownership of our streets, although sometimes they are temporarily taken over by threatening gangs of youths while we hide inside our houses. We have no control over the labour we do for our bosses everyday, we are alienated from our working activity because we don't 'own' any part of it, even the time spent doing it, and the only useful thing we produce for ourselves are a few pieces of paper known as money. We are spectators of the political circus and the rest of the world of entertainment. The important decisions, concerning our working lives and our daily existence (our *time* and our *effort*), as citizens of this great democracy, are taken behind closed doors, where we can't interfere, and then presented to us a *fait accompli*.

When we look deeply we might realise that we 'own' nothing, that we are merely guests, that we don't feel at home anywhere, that we are foreigners even in our own skins. Lucid native peoples, like those found in the depths of the Amazonian rain forest, or some aboriginal peoples in Australia, have looked at the way we live in the 'developed' world and they feel sorry for us because they think that we don't live like human beings. We have forgotten how to live and what living is for. We are unable to take *pleasure*, the one and only thing that it *is* worth living for.

twelve

What doctrine call you this, Che sera, sera,

What will be, shall be?

Christopher Marlowe. *Dr. Faustus*.

What's wrong with Mr. Redwood? clearly lots of things, but that is not really the issue, the issue is what's wrong with us? The fact that we put up with Mr. Redwood, and the rest of his kind, shows how weary we are, how scuttlingly ignoble we are, and how easy it is has become for us to listen to their dead voices and their dead words.

We don't expect anyone to agree with anything in the above text and we aren't seeking to 'convert' anyone to our way of thinking, we just want to make our objection to what Mr. Redwood represents *public*. We do, however, hope that if you have got this far you will think carefully about what we have said, one thing we have discovered in our years as amateur poets, literary critics and dilettante dandies is that people usually fail to read things *properly* before they fly off the handle or give up.

As for our little poetry club, we are all re-locating to Slough, where we feel the climate for poetry may be kinder.

WOKINGHAM AMATEUR POETRY CLUB. 1999.