

# Editorial

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## Cultures of Capitalism

As Jonathan Rutherford argues in his essay in this issue, since the 1970s we have seen big changes in the patterns of world politics, economics and culture. Manufacturing has massively shifted from the north to the south, while the workforce in rich countries has divided between the highly paid in the knowledge and finance sectors and the low paid in caring and service industries (not to mention the large numbers of people who are marginal to the mainstream economy). These class trends, along with the increasing dominance of finance capital, have led to increasing inequality both between and within countries. In the meantime cultural industries have become ever more important, and a privatised consumer culture seems to be colonising the globe. Contributors to this issue engage with these and other major changes of the last four decades, in an attempt to make sense of them, and to find ways of challenging the 'common sense' of neo-liberal ideology and market capitalism.

Zygmunt Bauman looks at some of ideological underpinnings of our privatised culture. He argues that, contrary to widespread claims of the end of ideology, and of a non-ideological politics, what we have witnessed is a major - ideological - change whereby it is asserted that thinking about any kind of social totality, or composing visions of a good society, is a waste of time; and that looking to society for solutions for individual problems is equally pointless. Winning social recognition as a successful competitor is seen as the main path to happiness, and those who fail in this competition can be seen simply to have made the wrong choices. Zygmunt's essay goes on to look at some of the social and political consequences of this ideology of privatisation.

Andrew Cooper and Michael Rustin, in separate essays, look at what has happened in the welfare state during this period. Andrew argues that the transformations that have taken place can be understood as part of the nation state's shift to become a market state. The market's logic has gradually pervaded what was once seen as a separate sphere, outside commercial values; its organising imperative has become the shaping of our behaviour to produce efficient and competitive workers - and consumers - to assist in the national competitive enterprise. Michael argues that, though we do now inhabit a system in which there is no longer an explicit conflict of values between a capitalist ethos of competition and an opposed ethos of equality and social solidarity, differences of value do continue to exist

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inside the institutions. Commitment to the idea of a welfare state remains strong, and it is possible to pursue arguments within this hegemonic system, including an engagement with the redefinition of welfare goals in terms of enhanced opportunities and capacities.

Michael Fielding argues that the government's personalisation agenda in education - promoted as a way of allaying anxiety about the subordination of other educational priorities in the utilitarian drive to produce better workers - should in fact be understood as simply another way of managing learners. Personalisation raises the question of what kind of people - and hence what kind of education - we are seeking to nourish. Education policy is currently produced as if such questions are already settled, and in an overall framework in which the needs of the economy are dominant.

George Shire looks at the ways in which discourses of racialisation have been changing in the era of neoliberalism. He argues that notions of structural inequality have been sidelined, and an emphasis placed on a legalistic notion of rights - an approach that fails to recognise the conditions that produce inequality, including the practices and cultures of racism. Whiteness still circulates as an axis of power, at global, national and local levels, but its effects are generally unrecognised - even, or perhaps especially, when race itself is put forward as explanation for social behaviour, as in recent debates about street crime.

Elsewhere in the issue Allan Kellehear argues that western societies no longer recognise the processes of dying - except in the very limited cases of those with terminal illnesses such as cancer - and that there is a need for a greater understanding of how to support people at the end of their lives. Andrew Pearmain, drawing on Gramsci's ideas about the national-popular, puts forward a view of Englishness that is likely to stimulate debate; George Irvin shows how the Anglo-American economic model has not only led to increasing levels of inequality but is also likely to precipitate a global recession; and Michael Prior argues that, given Gordon Brown's apparent desire to entrench Labour as a centre-right nationalist party, it is time for the left to get itself better organised and networked. Finally, Jon Cruddas discusses with Jonathan Rutherford his views on socialism, class and the prospects for a left renaissance within the Labour Party.

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We'd like to thank everyone who participated in the four Soundings seminars on

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the Cultures of Capitalism. They were, by general agreement, a great success and we hope to have a short film of the first two which will at some point be available on the Soundings website ([www.soundings.org.uk](http://www.soundings.org.uk)). The plan has always been that the seminars would be part of a longer term rethinking of left politics. Our aim is to continue with a new series next autumn. In the meantime the debate on capitalism and class will continue at the fourth *Soundings* event on 'Class and Culture' on Saturday 28 June at the usual venue, the Tavistock Centre. There will be around 80 places. Speakers so far include Beatrix Campbell and Jon Cruddas. Make a note of the date in your diary. We'll be circulating more details in the Lawrence and Wishart enews (See ad in this issue).

SD & JR

## Andrew Glyn 1943-2007

The socialist economist Andrew Glyn died on 22 December 2007. He belonged to a generation of socialist scholars who challenged the orthodoxies of the past and pioneered new ways of thinking about the historical phase of capitalist development which began in the 1970s. The *Soundings* editorial board crosses three generations, so some of us knew him well, while others knew him mainly by reputation. The first book of his I read was *Capitalism Unleashed* (Oxford University Press 2006). It is a brilliant and lucid analysis of a capitalist system that has been 'running the film of history backwards ... and returning to an older stage of liberalism'.

In his introduction Andrew refers to *British Capitalism, Workers and the Profits Squeeze*, the classic book he'd written with his friend Bob Sutcliffe in 1972. In it they had described how the huge share of the national income taken by the working class between 1964 and 1969 resulted in a crisis of profitability. 'Capital's necessary counter-attack demands that the struggle assumes a more political character.' Written seven years before the advent of Thatcherism, their analysis was prescient of the whirlwind to come.

Andrew wrote a contribution to the online debate in the lead up to the 2007 *Soundings* June event, and Bob Sutcliffe spoke at the seminar. Andrew had been due to speak at the 'Cultures of Capitalism' Seminar in February 2008.

Shortly after I had heard the news of Andrew's grave illness, I was looking

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through a tiny second-hand bookshop down on the Dorset coast. Its owner was a miracle worker and its cramped shelves were packed with gems. At the back of my mind was Bob and Andrew's book. And there it was, at £3, a Penguin Special with its very 1970s title. Crammed between two large hardbacks, it was more than just a small book with its pages yellowed and loosening. It was proof - and we do need it today - that history is there for us, a resource that will help lead us into the future. And the work of people like Andrew who have helped make it is still there to lend us a hand.

*Jonathan Rutherford*

# Soundings

## June seminar

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The fourth *Soundings* annual event will take place on Saturday 28 June at the Tavistock Centre, 120 Belsize Lane, London NW3, 10.30 to 5pm.

The theme will be 'Culture and Class', with a focus on the impact of the new capitalism on class and class cultures. Speakers confirmed to date are Beatrix Campbell and Jon Cruddas MP.

Registration costs £30 for subscribers and £50 for non-subscribers (this fee includes an excellent lunch provided by the Tavistock caterers). To reserve a place, send a cheque to FREEPOST, LON 176, London E9 5BR (no stamp needed) or you can register online at [www.soundings.org](http://www.soundings.org).

### **Special offer for new standing order subscribers.**

If you subscribe before the conference, we will charge you £30 for your ticket and only £20 for your new sub. So £50 will cover the costs of admission and a subscription. To take advantage of this offer please fill in the form on p160 of this journal.

*The event is organised in association with Compass, Red Pepper and Renewal.*

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