

by Ed McDonnell, active in politics and worker organisation in the UK for fifty years. A retired lecturer, he taught workplace union representatives/shop stewards.

'It's the system' - *what shopfloor workers always said to this writer when he worked in industry and argued against the wealth and power of employers, business people and the rich.*

'A lesson from the Obama years – failure to seize the opportunities offered by the great recession to reform an economic system that has worked against most Americans for four decades.' (The Observer 17-1-2021)

The state humanity is in is ridiculous and unnecessary. On top of the problems we always have with jobs, health, recessions, war and the rest, we're wrecking our environment while allowing our world to be governed by anti-people crazies. With our technical knowledge and ability to cooperate to produce all we need and more, it needn't be like this. To be able to change that, we need to get the basic workings of society clear in our heads.

People and politicians and commentators only talk about things happening. They don't talk about how they happen, from how we interact in business, the economy and politics - the system. They just treat it as how the world is. We ignore how we relate in the vital tasks of making a living, making money and making products and services!

It's because conservatives convince us that the system is the only way. So people just get on with their daily lives, meeting their needs, enjoying their pleasures, and just expect 'the government' to 'run the country'. But governments and politicians – Prime Ministers, Presidents; Members of Parliament, Congress(w)men; and political institutions – Parliament, Congress, Assemblies - don't simply 'run the country'. They aren't the source of everything that happens in society, they come from society and the system.

And in the system people have different roles and interests, most importantly on the basic issue - having to make a living or make money. To do that, you have to relate

to and interact with others. We need to be clear about the different ways people do this and how it means they have different interests in how the system works. A minority run businesses and companies, organise the production and sale of goods and services, and provide work. Most other people get a job, working for these business people or for public bodies. So, in the central arena of business and jobs, people relate differently and have different interests. And they get very different incomes, so they are different in politics, in their need for public services and support. People are in different interest groups. In everyday business or work, the different groups look out for their interests. In politics, they promote relationships and public policies that suit these interests.

The political parties have to claim to represent everybody's interests but it's not true. It's certainly not true of conservatives. They represent the interests of business people and the wealthy. Labour or progressive, social-democrat parties represent the rest, mostly workers. So

political parties and politicians come from and broadly represent different interest groups or classes. Classes defined by real roles and relationships.

The Essence of The System

The one thing to see about the system is that business people run the world, because they organise the essential functions of producing things and generating jobs. By organising politically too, generally as conservatives, they dominate the world via politics as well. They are a class – the business class. With this basic fact, everything else about the system becomes clearer.

The majority of people make their living by working for business people, or for public bodies. That should mean we call them a class, defined by that definite, vital and unarguable role in the system, being a worker. Not by less important things.

It looks like we do need business people to organise most of what we do. Not enough people support the state doing it. But we need to regulate the business class, to

make them behave civilly. For that, we need to be far more organised, and these works explain how. But if we don't do that, let's at least get everyone to see how it works and build that into political debate.

Conservatives claim the basis of the system is individuals trading freely, as equals, in free markets. This simplistic view is from when people made the case for freedom of religion, political rights and markets free from the dictatorship of monarchy, centuries ago. Conservatives still see it like this, saying the key issue as 'the individual' versus 'the state', and trumpet it as 'liberty'.

Ok, we do have individual rights but it's nonsense to claim it's the basis of society, that's just not how the world works. We are highly social. Look at all our 'collectivisms', like family, community, religion, identity, clubs, football fandom, patriotism. Our mindset, our talk, what we do, are full of 'we' and 'us' and 'our'.

That includes conservative's own talk and actions. Most of them don't operate as individuals. In the vital activity of (for them)

making money and (for us) making a living, the efficiency of mass production, and free markets, have led inevitably to the collectivism of industrial production. Organised by them. They organise the many companies and corporations and organise the rest of us into industrial workforces. They organise and run the global system of mass production and trade. In this industrialised, micro-managed, trading, marketized, commercialised, financialised, corporate, nation-state, connected, globalized society, we are hugely collective and inter-dependent. The big issue isn't the individual versus the state but the distribution of power in all this collectivism. But conservative theorists and parties represent these very collective business people. Their talk of individualism might fit with a world of small traders and genuine self-employed. In the real, industrial world, it is really to divert us from organising while they do organise. All the above is obvious if you just look at it. It results, first of all, in huge inequality of power, and, as a result, of wealth.

Yet people ignore it. We need everyone to talk about it and develop a common understanding of it.

Everyone knows what's wrong with the outcomes of the system but not the processes that enable it. People call it capitalism but that only evokes a remote level where invisible people invisibly accumulate money and power. It doesn't explain capitalism's key relationships and how they are rooted in, and observable in, everyday life.

We give the system status above and beyond us, as self-standing 'capitalism'. But it's just how we relate to each other, enforced in the everyday world and in politics by business people. We can do it differently. However, it has many well-established relationships, often embedded in law. To change all that through politics, our rights are limited. You get one vote, about every four years, voting isolated from one another, on all the issues bundled together, for political representatives who can ignore you, with minority parties hostile

to the interests of the majority often getting into government.

Most people oppose excess wealth and agree the rich should be taxed more. But the rich claim they earn their wealth from their abilities and effort. They get away with that because workers don't see that business people make most of their wealth from the work they themselves do. How capital and wealth is made, in the work process, by workers, is concealed by just referring to 'capitalism'. It means the central relationship in creating and distributing wealth - how employers buy labour and workers sell it, the trade in labour, the trade in people - goes unexamined.

Here it is - with most workers not being organised in unions and not negotiating collectively, the deal on starting or keeping a job is made, in 'free' labour markets, between an employer and an individual worker. In industrial economies - which are what we have - most employers, even small businesses, have many staff. With all the other staff they have producing whatever

the business or public service does, employers can drive a hard bargain with each one, individually, because they have enough staff to be able to do without any one of them. And, as everyone knows, they do.

This is how workers are in an unequal bargaining position. With these 'free' labour market conditions, each worker is of only 'marginal utility' (or usefulness) to the employer. Any one worker needs the job more than the employer needs them. Call this a different 'ratio of need'. While it's a supremely important political point, it's also just plain arithmetic and undeniable !

It is why business people, and public employers, can say 'take it or leave it'. It is how employers can be the 'boss' of people who are, according to the free market, individualist view, their equal trading partners. And with these being industrialised economies, when they say 'Go somewhere else if you don't like it', in another job you are usually up against the same unequal trading relationship with the employer.

It is the most important feature of the system. Business people make money and workers make their living in this unequal trade in the job deal. It is what enables the huge imbalance of wealth and power between business people (and public employers) and workers. It's how most wealth is acquired. Business owners use it to not pay staff the full price of what they sell their work for, and take the difference for themselves. They don't earn their power and wealth from what they actually do in production but from taking the trouble to organise it and get us to do it, on these unfair terms of trade.

This unspoken unfairness, sometimes brutal, inflicted on fellow-citizens, the great majority, in making their living, gives them the right to organise in unions to respond to and match business people's organisation. It's up to us to do the same as them - take the trouble to organise, act collectively, and aim to negotiate with them as equals.

But because the system is so established, accepted and poorly-understood, people don't notice it is the real problem. So,

confused and dismayed, some give up on politics. Others, angrily seeking answers, adopt crazy conspiracy theories; divide us by racial groupings and in culture wars; blame flimsily-defined 'metropolitan elites'; and support maverick conservatives who get them to blame-anybody-and-anything-but-us-and-our-system.

We'll do better when we share a clear, factual, understanding of the system as a reference point for political debate. The System Explained provides one. It explains the roles and relationships, rewards, and penalties, obligations and protections, rights and wrongs, of public life. It shows how power and wealth, powerlessness and unfairness and poverty, come from social organisation and lack of organisation. It shows how the majority organising in their economic role as workers would make the system much fairer. It shows how humanity can relate better, fairly, and run a sustainable global society. It does it by showing how we interact together ordinarily every day, without academic talk

of economics, capitalism, liberalism, socialism or communism.

Political thinking and debate not based on the system is futile. When you hear politicians, commentators, or anyone, talk about politics, relate what they say to the system. When you talk politics with people, don't just exchange views and attitudes - relate it to the system, to your role in it, theirs, their family, friends, neighbours and workmates roles.

Finally - 'capitalism' and 'free markets' as names for the system puts it above our heads, above us. Capitalism's core activity is business. Capital is created in business. We encounter business every day, take part in it as workers and consumers, speak naturally about it, it is located in our normal experience. So let's just call it 'the business system' to be more comfortable talking about it and evaluating it.

What We Need To Do

*To solve humanity's problems, we need to get it widely understood,
to get it accepted in everyday political*

talk, that -
...business people run the world more than politicians do...
...because they organise the production of goods and services, the buying and selling of them and of people's labour - work, jobs and trade...
...this makes them 'the economy'
(most of it)...
...being 'the economy' gives them inherent, decisive political power, even without them acting directly in politics, under any government...
...to act directly in politics, the most class-conscious of them organise and run the conservative parties...
... some of them organise and run the conservative media...
... and that – politics comes from this system, that business people dominate, not the other way round...
...politicians can regulate its unfairness but won't (conservatives) or don't enough (progressives).
... Conservative parties exist to obstruct the system from being regulated.

...They represent business people and it's their system.

... The system is what conservatives conserve.

... politics is a process that 'rides-on-top' of the system, through which you might get improvements in how you and your fellow-workers are treated in it.

To see what individual freedom people have in business and work, look again at how free markets operate. They develop inevitably to industrialism so that practically, the majority have to work for the minority business class, and be dominated by them unless regulated and made fair by workers unionising and putting in progressive governments.

Conservatives claim, and liberals accept, that free markets provide everyone with 'opportunity'. But in our industrial systems only a few can really succeed. Most people will inevitably be standard workers. There can only be fairness in who gets the better positions.

And - business people don't themselves operate as individuals!

***All day, each and every day,
they organise and act together
collectively, as businesses,
as companies, as corporations.***

They are a class - the business class. Some are alright as people, and credit them for their organisation and enterprise etc. But as a group they exploit and mistreat the great majority, viciously so in their opposition to us organising too.

The great majority of citizens – to remind of our political status – are workers.

But compared to the business class we represent ourselves weakly in everyday society and politics. We let them dominate us at work, in political debate; in political action. We are so weak we don't even see them as a class, nor ourselves... haven't got names for their class or ours and ...

... don't organise together and act together like they do.

Business people organise in their meaningful, active, everyday roles (in companies and corporations). We need the majority of citizens to organise in their economic roles, as workers, in unions...

*... with this collective strength, stand up at work to the business class and to public sector managers... and...
...represent themselves in public life, as mature citizens... speaking together through credible institutions, their unions... join business people as 'players' in the system.
...in politics, match up to the business class by doing as they do and act in politics organised in their own economic role...
...in mass progressive political forces and parties, with other progressive groups ...
...and run their own progressive media to counter the effect of the propagandist conservative media on political thinking.
Progressives always have better policies for the majority than conservatives. What they lack is organisation and its use to communicate policy and get support for it.
Widespread organisation will itself enable independent communication of progressive attitudes and policies throughout society and politics, that will counter conservative media. (Social media is not ideal for this. It is not people acting together in substantive*

social organisations but mostly just people mouthing off as atomised individuals).

It's because we aren't clear about these basics of the system that many -

... find politics confusing and, not recognising and opposing the dominant people in society, the business class, group themselves and others by often shallow 'identities' based on low-relevance attributes like skin colour, and allow these identities to define their politics... and allow the business class minority, who mostly care only for themselves, to govern, disastrously for themselves and all of us.

We need to persuade fellow-citizens to stop identifying themselves and others like this - by appearance, locality or personal preferences - but by more meaningful things like how they behave and by what they do - by how they act and interact in the practical world, of business, jobs, the economy and politics - by economic class (not, sillily, by mass culture)...

... to persuade the worker majority, blue-collar, white-collar, whatever colour, whatever gender, to find their main identity

in their most important, practical role, in being, with most other citizens, a worker, a member of the worker class.

When we share a clear understanding of the system such as put here and in the full book it'll be easier to make sense of politics, discuss the issues widely, and organise to get society working fairly for all. The System Explained will help, explaining the system clearly using everyday language and locating it in our daily experience.

We need to spread this explanation of the system... the rights and wrongs of it... show it is true, not just opinion, because it is drawn from observable everyday, life experience... explaining especially how business people and public employers get power over workers from having many staff and being able to do without any one... and how to make it fairer by organising... spread this view widely, globally.