

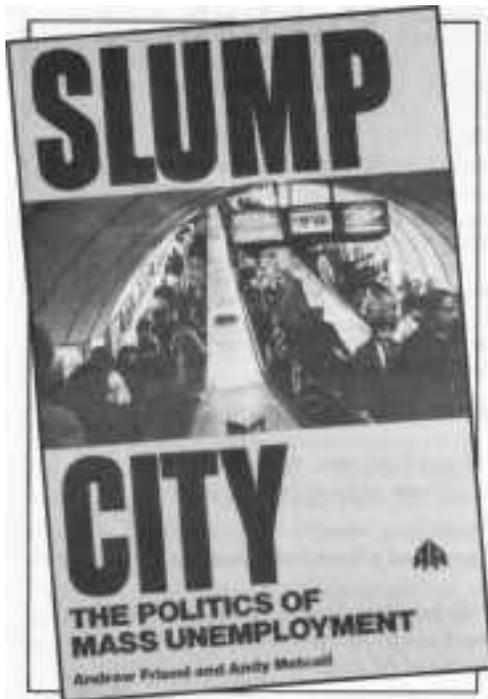
# Reviews

## SLUMP CITY, THE POLITICS OF MASS UNEMPLOYMENT

Andrew Friend & Andy Metcalf

Pluto Press 1981 pb £3.95

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So many appeals to working class action gloss over the uncomfortable fact that the working class is divided against itself. If divisions are recognised — well, then, they are deplored and further appeals are made to solidarity and unity. But such appeals are doomed to failure so long as we ignore the historical depth and scope of the rifts, the way they are capable of being used against us and the way divisions are sustained by the oppression we visit upon each other. This book — though its title would not bring it immediately to mind — is about the construction of *difference* in the working class. As such it is a timely contribution to socialist thinking and strategy.

*Slump City* is a far ranging book which

takes events in the older working class areas as its starting point and proceeds from the perception that 'there is no inner-city problem that can be understood outside of the uneven development of the capitalist system as a whole'. Friend and Metcalf argue that with the return of mass unemployment 'the crisis of social control generated by concentrations of people living on the margins of society is set to become more widespread and more intense' and the book as a whole is an attempt to chart how and why these concentrations occur, their class composition and their significance for the working class on one hand and the state on the other. The main character in the story is that part of the working class — which the authors call 'the surplus population' — for which capitalist industry has little need and less regard, and which for the state is its main drain on public expenditure and its primary problem in terms of control.

The term 'surplus population' is derived from Marx. He used it to characterise paupers, the irregularly employed, inhabitants of rural areas underemployed on the land and the recently juvenile, who had outgrown their usefulness to the employers of cheap labour. The definition used by Friend and Metcalf is a 20th century adaptation. They see the permanent or intermittent unemployed, capital's industrial reserve army, as a large component of this surplus population. But there are others: 'Those participating in the bottom reaches of the "black economy" outside the tax system; all those who are totally dependent on state benefits or forms of charity (including the mass of pensioners, the chronically sick and disabled and single parent families on social security); and those people who, although in regular employment in labour intensive sweated occupations or the state service sector, earn wages significantly below the national average and who live in households where the standard of living only exceeds the minimum poverty level because of the receipt of means-tested benefits . . .' In other words the surplus population today includes both those who are super-exploited by capital and those who are technically free from capitalist exploitation but whose human potentialities are wasted by a society crucified on the law of value.

*Slump City* is notable for steadfastly holding to an international and gender-conscious analysis, and an early chapter demonstrates the way the working class was reconstituted during the post-Second World War period of prosperity with many more women and immigrants entering the paid labour force. The authors underline the now increasingly made point that the character-

istic member of the working class was for far too long assumed unthinkingly by socialists to be white, male and a worker. It is because so many trade unions, so many party branches, have operated in this belief in the past and ignored the different experiences of exploitation and oppression that there is such lack of confidence in them. 'Unity can only be achieved on the basis of a politics that addresses the needs of those groups who, divided from each other, are united in their alienation from labourism.'

The implications of this analysis for socialist strategy are quite important. The rifts between the different groups that comprise the working class are in part created, deepened and made use of by capital and the state. (The chapter on law and order, although written well before the riots, is of immediate relevance here in showing the way in which the divide between organised workers and groups in the surplus population was exploited throughout the seventies in order to restructure the state's repressive apparatus.) But because the rifts are also determined by the long history of capitalist development, of imperialism and of patriarchy, there are tangible differences of interest between the several worlds. Take for instance the relatively well-off and the relatively impoverished among the working class. Skilled groups have often reached their fairly secure and prestigious standing by curtailing the chances of the mass of their class to improve their position. They in turn are genuinely threatened with a deteriorating standard of living by the de-skilling of their jobs and the introduction of unorganised labour, women, casuals, 'temps'. And this is only one of the ways in which we affect each other, for good or ill. Men have an adverse effect upon the life chances of women. The white working class is not innocent, as we sometimes prefer to think, of the exploitation of the colonised populations of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The higher standard of living of white workers in ex-imperial countries today stems in part from surplus value produced in the Third World. The divide between black and white in the working class in Britain today is caused by more than 'ideology' — and the same could be said of the divide between the in-work and the out-of-work, the 'industrious' and the 'scroungers', adults and school-leavers, men and women. Between mere prejudices lie material differences, power structures and struggles which any socialist strategy must pay close attention to if it is to be effective.

Friend and Metcalf's view of the crisis is a bleak one which carries with it a sense of urgency. For growth to be resumed on a capitalist basis in Britain they believe it will

be necessary for the state and the capitalist class to inflict major defeats on the organised working class on a scale far exceeding anything that has yet been approached. In this context, they see the divisions between the more prosperous layers of the working

class and the various groups that comprise the surplus population as being of crucial political importance. They see the struggle to create new unities and new alliances, to evolve an alternative political strategy rather than a purely economic one, as the major

priority for socialists today. The book does not seek to provide a detailed blueprint as to how this should be done, but it does raise major questions which will need to be widely debated if the task is to be attempted.

**Cynthia Cockburn**

As unemployment reaches Depression-era levels, Pramila Jayapal has a plan that responds with a New Deal“level of urgency.Â Euro Treasures Antiques owner Scott Evans is closing his art and antique store in Salt Lake City after 40 years. (Rick Bowmer / AP Photo).

EDITORâ€™S NOTE: The Nation believes that helping readers stay informed about the impact of the coronavirus crisis is a form of public service.Â It has not stemmed mass unemployment or the shuttering of small and medium-sized businesses. How should congressional Democratic leaders, who are currently crafting their proposal for the next Covid-19 relief package, react as this country sinks into a new Depression? Sunak is thought to favour easing lockdown restrictions to help firms reopen as the best means to combating unemployment. The chancellor could also announce VAT cuts and more tax breaks for companies to encourage them to retain staff or hire new workers. According to the foundation, lasting job losses will be most concentrated in hardest-hit sectors.Â Urging the government to mount a swift response to combat the highest unemployment since the early 1990s, Nye Cominetti, senior economist at the Resolution Foundation, said: “œBritain is slowly emerging from the lockdown that brought the economy to a halt and sent employment tumbling. But we are a long way off returning to business as usual, and its jobs crisis is far from over.â€

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Results from Google Books. Slump city by Andrew Friend, 1981, Pluto edition, in English. "Slump city" First published in 1981. Subjects. Economic conditions, Labor policy, Unemployed, Urban policy. Places. Great Britain, London (England). Edition Notes. Includes bibliographical references and index. Mass Unemployment is Now Worldwide. Global Unemployment. In an August report, the International Labour Organization (ILO) confirms that "The ILO does not focus on the political causes of mass unemployment, namely the actions taken by the governments, allegedly with a view to resolving the Covid pandemic. Moreover, the ILO tends to underestimate both the levels as well as the increase in unemployment. Unemployment in Latin America. In Latin America, the average unemployment rate was estimated at 8.1 per cent at the end of 2019. The ILO states, that it could rise by a modest 4 to 5 percentage points to 41 million unemployed. European Economy and the Politics of Mass Society. 1872-1914 " rate of urbanization continued to boom. Urban centers came to dominate provincial culture as centers of production, distribution and communication. 1873-1895 " Series of Economic slumps (falling prices and production) became termed as the "great depression" of the 19th century. " Rise of Mass Politics. Characterized by the growing power of public opinion as a political force. As mass politics developed, minority groups became increasingly identified as "outsiders" or "foreign influence" and pushed to the fringes of society. Ethnic minorities, Jews and Women commonly id. as outsiders. " Heinrich Schliemann: German, discovered city of Troy. Sir Arthur Evans: English, Crete. History

Before the Industrial Revolution unemployment was much less of a problem than it is now. It existed of course but there was not mass unemployment. In an agricultural society, the economy was usually stable and it changed little from year to year. However, from the 18th century, the British economy went into a cycle of booms and slumps (or recessions). However, unemployment rose in the late 19th century. It is not certain how much of the workforce was unemployed at that time but it was a significant problem. There was also underemployment when some men were not able to work a full week. On 13 November 1887, the unemployed held a mass demonstration in Trafalgar Square in London. Troops were sent in to clear the square and in the ensuing violence, one man died. Transcribed & marked up by Eoin O'Callaghan for the Marxists' Internet Archive.

**Slump City: The politics of mass unemployment** Andrew Friend and Andy Metcalf Pluto £3.95. This book's theme is the impact of the crisis upon the working class, particularly in the inner cities. It shows how on top of the old geographical distribution of unemployment – with far higher levels in Scotland, the North and South Wales than in the South East – there has also developed an uneven concentration within the major cities. The inner city areas have become areas of deindustrialisation, with double the average Slump city by Andrew Friend, 1981, Pluto edition, in English. Slump city First published in 1981. Subjects. Economic conditions, Labor policy, Unemployed, Urban policy. Places. Great Britain, London (England). Edition Notes. Includes bibliographical references and index. Global Slump urgently details how changes in the capitalist space-economy over the past 25 years, especially in the forms that money takes, have expanded widescale vulnerabilities for all kinds of people, and how people fight back. In a word, the problem isn't neoliberalism's capitalism. Spectre lays bare the dark underbelly of politics and economics, publishing outstanding and contrarian perspectives on the maelstrom of capitalism and emancipatory alternatives in crisis. The companion Spectre Classics imprint unearths essential works of radical history, political economy, theory and practice, to illuminate the present with brilliant, yet unjustly neglected, ideas from the past. Book reviews : Slump City: the politics of mass unemployment By ANDREW FRIEND and ANDY METCALF (Lond January 1982 - Race & Class. L. Bridges. Read more. Article. Perspectives on Public Policy. Sydney Checkland: British Public Policy 1776-1939: An Economic, Social... Book Information Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion. By Nur Masalha. Pluto Press. London. 2000. Pp. vii + 279. £14.99, 0 7453 1615 8. Read more. Article.