

Everyone

a loser



PEOPLE IN BRITAIN are now spending about £5 billion a year on the National Lottery - three times as much as they spend on books.

This turnover would be enough to pay for taking about 800,000 workers off the dole and getting them into jobs in the health service, education, building and public transport.

Charities' own lotteries and other fund-raising have suffered severely. Lottery boss Tim Holley pays himself nearly £500,000 a year. The "good cause" pay-outs from the lottery money have gone to such projects as paying Winston Churchill for his grandfather's papers which should already have been in public hands, converting a big estate in Scotland for grouse-shooting, and building a new sports centre for Eton College.

The runaway success of this grotesque rip-off casts a ghastly light on Britain today. Its logic is a caricature of the logic of capitalism itself.

The vast majority pay in every week without ever getting anything back. If they start poor, they just get poorer, while a tiny minority, chosen by luck, get ridiculously rich, and managers cream off an ample percentage. The poorer and more desperate people are, often the keener they are to pay in, because a "miracle" like a National Lottery win is their only way out of crippling debts and a dead-end life.

The appeal of the National Lottery is also a grotesque re-run of the common fallback argument for religion: a few prayers and rituals (like a few quid a week for the Lottery) don't cost much, and the possible prize is so big, be it eternity in paradise or multi-million pounds. Besides, do you want to be the odd one out, when everyone else is praying (or buying Lottery tickets)?

When people look for happiness through improbable good luck or miracles, that reflects social despair - people giving up on rational efforts to improve their future. It is the polar opposite of socialism. The success of the National Lottery is an index of the low ebb to which 16 years of Tory rule have reduced the British working class. Like that low ebb, it will end.

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