



A History of Capitalism According to the Jubilee Line

John O'Farrell

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'Sometimes you hear people say "Oh I had a nightmare journey on the tube" and you understand that their commute home on the London Underground was more unpleasant than usual. We don't take the word 'nightmare' to mean that in the middle of a packed carriage they literally realised that they were wearing their pyjamas and then felt their teeth crumbling as their childhood maths teacher stood before them pointing and laughing, only it wasn't exactly the Tube because it was also the kitchen.'

A Tube train is stuck underground because the economy above has collapsed. How has this happened and how will the passengers get out? Will they have to break the rules of Underground etiquette and actually speak to each other? In John O'Farrell's caustically funny short story, nothing is certain.

The city is filled with stories. In twelve books, twelve writers tell their tales of London life, each inspired by a different Underground line. Some are personal, some are polemical; every one is unique.

John O'Farrell, author of *The Man Who Forgot His Wife*, *An Utterly Impartial History of Britain* and *Things Can Only Get Better*, turns his comedic genius to the problem of capitalism, encapsulated in a Tube train full of passengers stuck underground – part of a series of twelve books tied to the twelve lines of the London Underground, as TfL celebrates 150 years of the Tube with Penguin.

A History of Capitalism According to the Jubilee Line Details

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Author : John O'Farrell

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Nick says

With its 150-plus years of history and its central place in the daily lives of millions of people, the London Underground exerts a strange fascination. Sometimes, this fascination tips over into downright geekiness. This is a book that both mocks and celebrates that geekiness, but takes it a stage further by turning a breakdown on the Jubilee Line into a comic metaphor for a crisis in capitalism (presumably inspired by the financial crisis of 2007-9). Should the trapped passengers head left towards Westminster, putting their trust in the state, or right towards Canary Wharf, the ultimate symbol of Thatcherite free-market enterprise?

It's an ingenious conceit, and O'Farrell raises more than a few laughs, but the book rarely rises above the level of an amusing newspaper column and the characters are little more than pegs on which the writer hangs caricatured arguments. Those expecting incisive political satire will be disappointed, but Tube geeks will probably find this a diverting read.

Ukgardenfiend says

This was a very different book and I really think that Penguin have pushed the boat out by commissioning this series with tfl to celebrate the 150 years of the Tube.

According to the description this is: John O'Farrell, author of *The Man Who Forgot His Wife*, *An Utterly Impartial History of Britain* and *Things Can Only Get Better*, turns his comedic genius to the problem of capitalism, encapsulated in a Tube train full of passengers stuck underground. and what we get is a wrapped up as a dream and is his thoughts on just why things got bad in banking and for the economy. We get to the finger in the dyke problem and just who was responsible and various philosophers and philosophies explaining and arguing about the situation.

If nothing else read the blurb on the back where O'Farrell describes himself as 6 foot in his stilettos, 7 out of 10 on the Tube geekiness scale and was once caught adding a new tube line which went to house in a meeting..

However, we picked up this book up at random and now I love the whole series and can't wait to read more - particularly the one *Mind The Child: The Victoria Line* by Camila Batmanghelidjh of Kids Company.

Colin says

Amusing political parable from the golden age before brexit.

Renae says

I found out about this book through one of Leena Norms' videos, and I'm glad I did.

Set in a dream where our protagonist is stuck on the Jubilee Line in a train that has come to a halt due to the

collapse of Western civilisation. What a start.

This dream serves as a platform (get it?) on which discussions about the history capitalism in Britain, captured symbolically by the stops on the Jubilee Line. It's a discussion that also brings in concepts of political economy, and democracy among others. Don't be daunted! These concepts are covered in digestible chunks of conversation lasting at most 2 pages. The book is only 108 pages after all.

My favourite parts were the train announcements and when he encounters Noam Chomsky and Roger Scruton at each others' throats. (Is there an award for best mental image - comedy? Give it to O'Farrell.)

Lorraine says

Dry, dry, dry. Trying too hard to be funnier, but drier than a fortnight-old cake. Has nothing we don't already know -- but then again it could've been more fun if the book were done in a fun way. The 'guest stars' were not funny at all (neither was the 'dry humor').

I suggest that Mr O'Farrell think about what he really wants to do, do the research, and write a sensible essay about it. It might even be funnier.

Ugh says

This is one of 12 books written in celebration of 150 years of London Underground - one book for each tube line. They're beautiful volumes, but I couldn't afford to buy all 12, so after some slightly painful deliberation I settled for this and the one dedicated to the Central Line.

And O'Farrell's Jubilee Line offering is a dream - its title perhaps seems rather dry, but what lies inside is anything but. However, I don't want to give away any more than the cover already does, as the realisation of what the plot entails is the book's chief source of delight. Suffice it to quote O'Farrell's own description of his idea for the book: 'Das Kapital meets the Poseidon Adventure somewhere in Zone 2'.

The second greatest source of delight lies in how the plot unfolds, and the third in the fact that the plot is so dependent, factually speaking, on the Jubilee Line itself. That the book manages to be both informative and highly entertaining - the holy grail of reading - only adds to the pleasure.

I probably shouldn't set expectations too high, so I'll offset my praise by saying that I found the sendup of the tube a little cliched, and the comedy a little too reliant on farce for my personal taste. However, that's your lot: I'll nitpick no further, as I enjoyed ...Jubilee Line so much. Purchase a ticket and get on board!

Sarah says

Hilarious and brilliant, everyone should read this.

Paul says

The copy I read is described on the back cover by John O' Farrell himself as: "Das Kapital meets the Poseidon Adventure somewhere in zone 2." I can't think of any better description. The book is a short story of just a 100 pages that are really easy to read, in my case taking just over an hour or so.

Don't be put off by a rather dry sounding title, the plot is wonderfully witty with a brilliant ending (well first ending, it's all set in a dream so it has the cliché wake up at the very end which I'm never keen on and is the main reason I can't give it five stars.) Finally the book produces one of the greatest mental images I've ever had from a book; Noam Chomsky in a fight.

Anyone with a faint interest in the political landscape of Britain should give it the quick read it requires if only to make your next tube journey a bit more interesting.

Hayley Fletcher says

A thoroughly enjoyable little read set on a Jubilee line stuck in a tunnel. I'm sure many people have experienced similar situations. Hilarious tube announcements informing 'customers' of the situation, the typical characters of the tube including frustrated Northerners and Boris voters, and a well known but well hated political figure. When it comes to it are we lefty because that's what we genuinely think or has it become an anti-establishment fashion accessory? What's better public or private sector? left or right? With the Jubilee line as a microcosm of the age old debate this is a very funny and enjoyable read.

Bob Hilliar says

It took me less time to read than it does to ride from one end of the Jubilee line to the other. Still fun though.

Gavin Felgate says

This is Jubilee Line information. We would like to apologise for the inconvenience while we are being held in the tunnel. This is due to a crisis in capitalism.

The first line of John O'Farrell's novella demonstrates the absurdity that runs throughout it, as it portrays a dream sequence in which people find themselves stuck on an underground train in a tunnel, in a dystopic version of London where their transport system has gone bankrupt. The book's cover alone was enough to make me keen to read this, with its picture of Karl Marx and Margaret Thatcher, who people with vastly different political ideologies, sitting side-by-side on a train.

The book's events are narrated by the dreamer, who I presume is O'Farrell himself. There is an immediate social commentary on what public transport is like in Britain, with the surprise that people are *talking to each other*, which (as the narrator observes) only happens if something is going wrong. It soon becomes apparent that there are a lot of differences in political opinion, with a right-wing passenger getting into a

lengthy debate with a left-wing passenger while the others look on. Most of the debating ends up as a discussion of how the tube was constructed; in this case, it is all about London's Jubilee Line, "so called because its opening had missed the Queen's Silver Jubilee by two whole years", with a lot of commentary and critique about how its construction, including a few wry observations (Neasden has the only level crossing on the tube system - "And still it struggles to attract the tourists").

Through a series of increasingly bizarre announcements, it becomes apparent that the tunnel is starting to flood due to bad construction work, and the passengers are told to get off the train and walk to safety; the two characters from the left and right wings both suggest going in opposite directions, both believing they will be walking towards the safer part of the underground line that is not flooding.

The whole story has a wry, satirical tone as it looks at the different political views that are expressed by its characters, and at times becomes incredibly absurd; for example, at one point in the narrative, Noam Chomsky and Roger Scruton appear seemingly from nowhere and end up in a fist fight. The whole thing does start getting a bit overly political, and John O'Farrell describes himself as quite left wing, and it shows from some moments near the end that almost feel like he is getting up on his soapbox.

Overall, this was an unusual story; partially it forms a bizarre story set on the underground, but it is also a political commentary and also an excuse for O'Farrell to demonstrate his very detailed knowledge of London's underground network. I mostly found this book enjoyable though, despite it feeling like a surreal and politically-charged version of another book I recently read, William Leith's *A Northern Line Minute*. At its best I found this book to be hilarious and very entertaining, despite how scathing and cynical it became at times.

Violaine says

That was a great little book. I found it funny, super-British, ironic and weird. The plot is fairly simple and the dichotomy between left and right not particularly original, but the way it was told was funny and it was pleasantly written. I enjoyed it.

Barry Pierce says

Very interesting little book, read it in one sitting. Puts forward some interesting arguments about Capitalism, leftist and rightists, and the private vs. the public sector. Read it for: Interesting facts about the Jubilee Line, a fist-fight between Noam Chomsky and Roger Scruton, and Maggie Thatcher having an epiphany.

Adam Coenraads says

Yeah it was funny, yeah I laughed, yeah I learnt a bit of trivia, and yeah it didn't overstay its welcome, but it certainly felt like an extended newspaper column that had John O'Farrell largely trying to show off his ability to internally argue ideological structures.

Katie.dorny says

I really enjoyed this short story. It was interesting and a good mocking story of every typical British person. It was quite fast paced and engaging and I definitely enjoyed it.
