

One Green World

All over the world the present economic system plunders and wastes the Earth's non-renewable mineral and energy sources. All over the world it pollutes the sea, the air, the soil, forests, rivers and lakes. All over the world it upsets natural balances and defies the laws of ecology. Clearly this destruction and waste cannot continue indefinitely, but it need not; it should not and must not.

It is quite possible to meet the basic material needs of every man, woman and child on this planet without destroying the natural systems on which we depend and of which we are a part. The productive methods that would have to be adopted to achieve this are well enough known:

The practice of types of farming that preserve and enhance the natural fertility of the soil;

The systematic recycling of materials (such as metals and glass) obtained from non-renewable mineral sources;

The prudent use of non-renewable energy sources (such as coal, oil and gas) while developing alternative sources based on natural processes that continually renew themselves (such as solar energy, wind power and hydroelectricity);

The employment of industrial processes which avoid the release of poisonous chemicals or radioactivity into the biosphere;

The manufacture of solid goods made to last, not to be thrown away after use or deliberately to break down after a calculated period of time.

The Obstacle: the Profit System

So what stands in the way? Why isn't this done? The simple answer is that, under the present economic system, production is not geared to meeting human needs but rather to the accumulation of monetary wealth out of profits. As a result, not only are basic needs far from satisfied but much of what is produced is pure waste from this point of view - for example all the resources involved in commerce and finance, the mere buying and selling of things and those poured into armaments.

The whole system of production, from the methods employed to the choice of what to produce, is distorted by the imperative drive to pursue economic growth for its own sake and to give priority to seeking profits to fuel this growth without consideration for the longer term factors that ecology teaches are vitally important. The result is an economic system governed by blind economic laws which oblige decision-makers, however selected and whatever their personal views or sentiments, to plunder, pollute and waste.

This growth-oriented and profit-motivated capitalist system exists all over the world, in the West in the form of an economy dominated by large private enterprises and multinational corporations and in Russia, China and other such

countries in the form of a state capitalism.

If needs are to be met while at the same time respecting the laws of nature, then this system must go.

What is the Alternative?

If we are to meet our needs in an ecologically acceptable way we must first be able to control production - or, put another way, able to consciously regulate our interaction with the rest of nature - and the only basis on which this can be done is the common ownership of the means of production.

By common ownership we don't mean state property. We mean simply that the Earth and its natural and industrial resources should no longer belong to anyone - not to individuals, not to corporations, not to the state. No person or group should have exclusive controlling rights over their use; instead how they are used and under what conditions should be decided democratically by the community as a whole. Under these conditions the whole concept of legal property rights, whether private or state, over the means of production disappears and is replaced by democratically decided rules and procedures governing their use.

This is why a fully democratic decision-making structure must be an essential feature of the system that is to replace private and state capitalism. The centralised, coercive political state must be dismantled and replaced by a decision-making structure in which everyone is free to participate on an equal basis.

It is possible to envisage, for instance, the local community being the basic unit of this structure. In this case people would elect a local council to coordinate and administer those local affairs that could not be dealt with by a general meeting of the whole community. This council would in its turn send delegates to a regional council for matters concerning a wider area and so on up to a world council responsible for matters that could best be dealt with on a world scale (such as the supply of certain key minerals and fuels, the protection of the biosphere, the mining and farming of the oceans, and space research).

A Needs-Oriented System

Given the replacement of the coercive political state by such a democratic decision-making structure, the network of productive units could then be geared to meeting needs. We deliberately use the word "geared" here because what we envisage is not the organisation of the production and distribution of goods by some central planning authority but the setting up of a mechanism, a system of links between productive units, which would enable the productive network to respond in a flexible way to the demands for goods and services communicated to it.

If the existing situation, where needs are not met in such basic fields as food and housing, is to be avoided then people must be guaranteed access to

the goods and services to satisfy their needs. We think the best way to do this is not for some central authority to distribute purchasing power to people but to let people choose for themselves what their real needs are and then to take, in accordance with this choice, what they need from the common store of goods. In other words, a system of free access to goods and services in which money would be unnecessary and so would cease to be used.

Signals to the network of productive units as to what to produce would thus come from what people actually chose to take from the common stores under conditions of free access. This would essentially be a question of stock control which we can envisage being done, in the first instance, at local community level. In this case needs would be communicated by local communities to the productive network as demands for given amounts of specified goods and materials. This would then be communicated throughout the system from supplier to supplier and if necessary to other regions or to the world level, again as demands for given amounts of specified goods and materials.

Such a system of production to directly supply needs would be essentially self-regulating as the productive system would be responding to real needs in much the same way as the market system is supposed to respond to monetary demand. It is the alternative both to the mechanisms of the market and to central state planning.

Naturally, if people are guaranteed the satisfaction of their needs in this way then work will also be radically transformed. From being a drudgery performed to obtain a money income, work can become meaningful. What will be produced will be useful things that people really need. The whole employee/employer relationship will come to an end. Instead there will be free and equal women and men working together to produce what they need.

In these changed circumstances work can become a voluntary service organised on a democratic basis. People will be able to choose the work they do, in a sector of production they feel suits them. Productive units can be run by a democratic council elected by all those working in them.

In the needs-oriented society we are describing here the concept of "profits" would be meaningless while the imperative to "growth" would disappear. Instead, after an initial increase in production needed to provide the whole world's population with an infrastructure of basic services (such as farms, housing, transport and water supplies) production can be expected to platform off at a level sufficient to provide for current needs and repairing and maintaining the existing stock of means of production.

What is envisaged here is a society able to sustain a stable relationship with nature in which the needs of its members would be in balance with the capacity of nature to renew itself after supplying them.

We Call It Socialism

So, to sum up, the alternative to the present capitalist system of profit-seeking and monetary accumulation involves:

The absence of any property rights, private or state, over natural and industrial resources needed for production;

The existence of a non-coercive democratic decision-making structure;

The guaranteed access for all to what they need to satisfy their needs;

The orientation of production towards the direct satisfaction of real needs in a flexible and self-regulating way without the intervention of money and buying and selling;

The organisation of work as a voluntary service under the democratic control of those working in the various productive units.

We call this system "socialism", but it is the content, not the name, that is important. In any event, it obviously has nothing in common with the existing state capitalist regimes (as in Russia and China) or proposals for state control (as by the Labour left) which are often erroneously called "socialist".

Getting from Here to There

The means by which the new society can be achieved are determined by its nature as a society involving voluntary cooperation and democratic participation. It cannot be imposed from above by some self-appointed liberators nor by some well-meaning state bureaucracy but can only come into existence as a result of being the expressed wish of a majority - an over-whelming majority - of the population. In other words, the new society can only be established by democratic political action and the movement to establish it can only employ democratic forms of struggle.

Because the present system is, as a system must be, an inter-related whole and not a chance collection of good and bad elements, it cannot be abolished piecemeal. It can only be abolished in its entirety or not at all. This fact determines the choice as to what we must do: work towards a complete break with the present system as opposed to trying to gradually transform it.

Gradual reform cannot lead to a democratic, ecological society because capitalism is an economic system governed by blind, uncontrollable, economic laws which always triumph in the end over political intervention, however well-meaning or determined this might be. Any attempt on the part of a government to impose other priorities than profit-making risks either provoking an economic crisis or the government ending up administering the system in the only way it can be - as a profit-oriented system in which profit-making has to be given priority over meeting needs or respecting the balance of nature. This is not to say that measures to palliate the bad effects of the present economic system on nature should not be taken but these should be seen for what they are: mere palliatives and not steps towards an ecological society.

The only effective strategy for achieving a free democratic society in
.harmony with nature is to build up a movement which has the achievement of such
a society as its sole aim.