



NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

## HEALTH CARE MADNESS



Most people would agree that good health is our most important possession, yet many things in our modern society work against achieving that goal. Firstly, the food that we eat should ensure strong, healthy development and a robust immune system capable of fending off most attacks on it. Unfortunately, we are not in charge of our own food supply system. It is in the hands of people whose only objective is to make the largest profit margin possible. To achieve this, our food is adulterated, outsourced, and mass-produced. Large-scale factory farming has the economy of scale but is forced to use inordinate amounts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides for crops and techniques such as growth hormone and steroid injections for animals to achieve its goal of maximizing production. The global search for cheaper production opportunities and cheap transportation subsidized by compliant governments, means that our food travels great distances to reach us (the average distance traveled by food on a Toronto plate

is estimated at 2 000 kilometres), and this has spawned new phenomena to increase shelf life such as the use of trans fats and irradiation. The former is a major health hazard and the latter greatly reduces the nutritional value of food. All this is for no other reason than to serve the profit motive. All communities could quite easily produce most of their own food needs using techniques such as organic farming that has proved to be more efficient and healthy, and cuts the waste and pollution of the massive transportation systems now required. The power of big capital has led to gigantic budgets for fast food advertising and availability resulting in epidemics of diseases such as obesity and diabetes, even among children. John Schumaker wrote in *New Internationalist*, July 2004, "Over the past two decades, for example, aggressive advertising by the soft drink industry has seen high sugar soft drink consumption double in children 6-11, a major contributor to the worsening epidemic of childhood obesity and diabetes." Soft drink marketers would call this a huge success. While we in Canada are grateful for a nominally 'free' health care system, public services are erod-

ing in favour of a free market pay system and governments turn a blind eye to these Canada Health Act violations. In addition, one has to wonder why, after 50 years of exponential growth in productivity and profits, free access to eye, ear, and dental care has not materialized, as promised, and cash-strapped hospitals are struggling to maintain services. Health care is a huge business, none more so than the pharmaceutical industry. While within the capitalist system the drive for increased profit and market share is the norm, the drug companies have been spectacularly successful. In the 2001 recession, for example, the Fortune 500 companies lost 53% of their value, while the drug companies' profits rose 32%. Lifestyle drugs for such 'conditions' as hair loss and skin blemishes that, sell well in the developed world, take preference over real necessities, especially in the Third World, because that's where the big profits are. The Third World makes up 80% of the world's population but only 10% of drug sales. Most of the people condemned to live there are struggling just to survive and cannot afford the high price of drugs and therefore realize a profit for the manufacturers. Thus, they are simply ignored. Malaria, for instance, affects 500 million world wide each year and claims 3 000 children's lives, **PER DAY**, yet the pharmaceutical companies have, between them, only produced one

Common Ownership means that the resources of the world and the means to produce useful goods from them would be owned by everyone and, therefore, by no one. All humanity would be producers meeting as equals to decide what, how, and where to produce based solely on mankind's needs. Distribution of goods and services would deny no one access to what they needed. This system would end the present class system and render money, trade, employment, exploitation, want, and war obsolete.

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preventative (not curative) drug in the last 40 years. It doesn't pay them to cure a disease! Many health conditions are caused by the toxicity of our environment. Polluted air, land, and water are the main cause of epidemic levels of cancer and a host of other diseases. Yet any attempt to force green production on manufacturers is met with evasive tactics by governments on behalf of their capitalist class

and cries of, 'It will destroy the economy and cost jobs'. Apparently destroying lives for the sake of profit is OK. So health, our most precious possession, is essentially out of our hands because the profit system is based on producing commodities with a view to profit, and health commodities are no exception. Food and health care simply present opportunities to invest and expand capital, no different than shoes or popcorn.

The effects on people and the planet, while regrettable, cannot be avoided without interfering with that goal. Thus the threat to the health of our planet and all its inhabitants' wellbeing will continue as long as the present economic system is in place. It is the job of the people who do not yet own and control the production and distribution of wealth to act politically to change this situation. Our current slate of politi-

cal parties, and their leaders and braintrusts are all in favour of continuing the capitalist system that brings the problems. Only the Socialist Party of Canada and its companion parties in The World Socialist Movement propose a viable alternative – production for use, not profit, and free access for all to all goods and services through the common ownership of the earth.

## END THE WAGES SYSTEM

The CBC radio program, "The Current", recently focused on losing one's job. A labour lawyer revealed that some employers were being less than honest with severance payments, and less than moral and ethical in the firing process. One example given was the case of a 63 year-old woman with 25 years of service, fired with just two years to go before retirement, throwing her life and plans into chaos. Another told of a newspaper employee who was summoned to the publisher's office and told in formal language with several other people in attendance, that his job was redundant and then escorted from the premises without being able to pick up personal effects from his desk. Not bad enough losing his job, he had the humiliation of being treated like a criminal. The lawyer was followed by an employer, and panel member of "Dragon's Den", a CBC television program whereby entrepreneurs present their business ideas, are grilled by the panel, and then accepted (given funding) or rejected, often with a stinging rebuke. This 'tough guy' was quite honest about

firings. A corporation, he said, doesn't have a heart or feeling. It is simply a paper agreement between risk investors whose DNA is to make profit. It's all about money, he continued, and in tough times, all measures must be taken to protect that capital. Lay-offs are an unfortunate part of the business cycle. This is an assessment of the system with which we can agree, except to him it's perfectly natural to continue this insane way of doing business. The 'business cycle' to which he referred is what Marx identified a hundred and fifty years ago as regular periods of steady production, leading to rapidly increasing production (a boom), eventually causing oversupply and reduced profit and production (a recession), followed by recovery to steady production. This cycle is inherent to the capitalist mode of production, so we can expect to see crises and job losses every decade or so. The timing, length, and depth of such recessions are not predictable, only that they will occur sporadically. All this shows that we work at the pleasure of capital. When profits are high and production is expanding, the worker

is a sought after commodity. When profits dip and production falls, the worker is expendable. Capital, therefore, dictates when you will have a job and when you will be out of work, struggling to survive. The worker must tolerate this insecurity because he has no ownership of, and no say in, the productive process. In fact, the workers own practically nothing but their personal possessions (and ability to labour). Even our houses and cars, for the most part, are owned by the banks. That fact has been shockingly brought to our attention as 2.3 million American homes, and 3% of all California homes became bank properties in 2008, and 2009 is expected to be even worse. In a system of Common Ownership and free access to all goods and services produced, energies in unneeded sectors of production would simply be applied where needed with no interruption in the access to the necessary goods and services for citizens. This end to recessionary insecurity and obeisance to capital can only come about when we end the wages system altogether and transform society to fulfill our needs rather than private profit.

### Socialist Party of Canada

BOX 4280 Victoria BC  
V8X 3X8, Canada

#### Victoria

Bill Johnson  
bill\_j@hotmail.com

#### Vancouver

John Ames  
james@telus.net

#### Manitoba

Jaime Chinchilla Solano  
jaimech@gmail.com

#### Ontario

John Ayers  
jpayers@sympatico.ca

Jacob Hodgins  
jacobhodgins@hotmail.com

#### Quebec

Michael Descamps  
mich\_international@hotmail.com