

## SAVE THE EARTH OR SAVE THE PROFITS?

*A translation of a pamphlet sent to us from our French comrades*

All forms of life, vegetable and animal, are part of a network of relationships called an ecosystem. This system is normally self-regulating so that, if disequilibrium occurs, it is corrected spontaneously, either restoring the former equilibrium or establishing a new one. The problem is that the industrial revolution came along, i.e. pollution of earth and water due to the dumping of toxic waste, or the use of non-recyclables, chemical fertilizers, nitrates, pesticides and other processes in agriculture; pollution of oceans due to an increase in maritime traffic, pollution of and from continental waterways, to shipwrecks of oil tankers (seventy recorded in 1996), to the discharge of toxic waste, chemicals, radioactive material, to over-fishing; air pollution due to massive utilization of fossil fuels and the development of individual automobiles, to destruction of forests, the lungs of the planet, to industrial accidents (Seveso 1976, Bhopal 1984, Tchernobyl 1986, Toulouse 2001), to emissions of greenhouse gases by vehicles, factories; deforestation leading to global warming and its consequences; rising the levels of the oceans due to melting of polar and continental glaciers; desertification; storms; acid rain; species extinction; stockpiling of nuclear weapons; development of mega cities that now house half the world's population. As to the social and economic consequences of the ecological crisis, they will be dire with ninety per cent of the population exposed to natural catastrophe, especially in the poor regions and half the world's population occupying coastal zones. How many climate refugees will be forced from flooded lands or from desertification that renders their lands unfit for agriculture? In the nineteenth century, some people were already concerned about the consequences of industrialization on the environment, but it was

the ecologists in the second half of the twentieth century, when the ravages caused by human activity worsened, who provoked a consciousness of ecological problems. To remedy this, conferences and summits were held where international accords were reached, e.g. Declaration of Rio, 1992, Protocol of Kyoto, 1997, on the greenhouse effect but rejected by the US, the biggest polluter in the world, and not respected by the signatories; the Earth Summit, Johannesburg, 2002, similarly denounced by the states submitting to global multinational interests. Not only were the weak objectives fixed by the summits not held to, but CO2 emissions increased 28% between 1990 and 2004, and for what reason! No nation is going to pass legislation that will penalize the competitiveness of its national enterprises in the face of foreign competition. It would be almost impossible to find international agreement that would penalize no one. That's the snag since competition for profits is the basis of our current system. Some attempts at international agreement have been made, e.g. the UN, founded with the goal of maintaining peace. Yet the twentieth century has experienced the most murderous and devastating wars in history. No accord aiming to limit the machinations of the multinationals in their tireless quest for profits is successful. The measures that favour the environment, and the fundamental transformation of the productive apparatus and transportation systems that these measures imply, hurt the interests of the enterprises and their shareholders, since adding to costs diminishes profits. Human beings are capable, whatever the form of production, of working with the environment. That was the case for many primitive societies that co-existed in complete harmony with the rest of nature and there's nothing to prevent that being possible today, based on our technology and methods of industrial production, but for the capitalists, they are a 'cost' that would penalize them, faced with international competition.

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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It isn't, then, that production itself, i.e. the use of nature to produce for human needs, that is incompatible with sustainability, but the use of certain productive methods that ignore nature's balance or that brings about changes too rapid to allow a new balance to develop. In effect, environmental preservation is a social problem that imposes on humanity the establishment of a rapport with the rest of nature. In practice, that implies a society that uses as much renewable sources of energy as possible and recycling of non renewable material; a society that, once the appropriate balance with nature is found, would hold a level of stable production and zero growth. That doesn't mean to say that changes are excluded on principle, but that all changes must respect the environment making a rhythm to which nature can adapt. Yet, the destructive methods of capitalist production over the course of the last two centuries destroyed the natural balance. What is called 'market economy', 'economic liberalism', 'free enterprise', or whatever euphemism is employed, the social system we live under is capitalism. Under this system, the means of producing and distributing social wealth – the means of society's existence – are the exclusive property of a dominant, parasitic, minority, the holders of capital or the capitalist class, in whose interests the system is inevitably managed. In effect, capitalism, ruled by economic laws that act as external constraints on human productive activities, and within which businesses compete on the market for short term economic gain, pushes the economic decision makers to adopt methods that serve profit without taking their ecological impact into account, and pillage the earth's natural resources without regard for the future. It isn't, then, man, but the capitalist system itself that is responsible for ecological problems. Not only do the salaried workers have no influence in business decisions, but those who have the power to make decisions – the capitalists and their managers – are themselves subject to the laws of competition and profit. Of course, capitalism must face up to the ecological problems sooner or later, but only after the fact, after having caused the damage. Yet the ecologists, critics of 'liberal capitalism', accept, like the other types of reformers, the economic dictatorship of the

minority, because they do not understand the relationship between environmental destruction and the private ownership of the means of production. That's why the Greens were forced to make concessions when, from 1977 to 2002, they participated in the Jospin government (France), in the decisions of this 'Left' majority government regarding genetically-modified corn and the nuclear question, among others, not to mention their complicity in social questions such as the laying off of 3 100 employees at the Renault closure, or the repression of the strikers occupying ASSEDIC in 1997, the closing of the shipyards at Le Havre in 1998, the postponement of reducing the retiring age to sixty at full rate, or the closing of 10 000 beds at Ile de France in 1999. Because, by definition, capitalism can only function in the interests of the capitalists, no palliative, no adjustment, no measure, no reform, is able (and never will be able) to subordinate capitalist private property to the interests of all. For that reason, only the threat of a socialist movement, based on the establishment of social ownership (hence socialism) of the means of existence of society, managed by, and in the interests of all, would push the capitalists to concede reforms favourable to workers for fear of losing the whole pie, but still retaining the system that causes the problems! It is, then, for the construction of such a movement that we launch a call to all workers conscious of the fact that their interests are in opposition to those of the capitalists, to all those who are subject to the incessant attacks and dangers of the capitalists' destruction of our planet, and wanting not just to patch up for now, but to solve the problems forever. Our overwhelming numerical superiority allows us to expect our will to be carried out. It is only after having the social means of existence under collective control that we would, at last ensure that their management is used no longer in the egotistical interests of today's owners, but, this time, truly in the interests of all. Only then will we be in a position of realizing a world in which the present system of competing states will be supplanted by a world community without borders, the wages system by voluntary labour, buying and trading by free access to the wealth produced, the competitive system

supplanted by cooperation, the class system by social equality. We are only able to heal the planet by establishing a society without private property, commodity production, or profit, where human beings are free to choose the employment of productive methods, because only such a society is free of the economic laws of the quest for profit and capital accumulation. In short, only a world socialist society, based on common ownership and the democratic management of the world's resources, is compatible with production that is respectful of our natural environment.

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