

# IMAGINE

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## WHAT'S INSIDE

### What you Need

<i>to Know</i> .....	1
<i>Climate Change and Capitalism</i> .....	2
<i>Jobs – Here Today, Gone Tomorrow</i> .....	4
<i>It's a Dog Eat Dog World</i>	
<i>The Future of the Future.</i>	5
<i>Obscene &amp; Heard</i> .....	6
<i>Which Way for Cuba? ...</i>	8
<i>Declaration of Principles</i> .....	9
<i>Our Companion Parties in the World Socialist Movement</i> .....	9
<i>John Ahrens 1911-2014</i> .....	10
<i>Poverty in Canada's Richest City</i> .....	10

**We welcome correspondence from our readers. Send email to [spc@iname.com](mailto:spc@iname.com) or write us at Box 4280 Victoria, BC Canada V8X 3X8**

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

After having read Ken Follett's "The Century Trilogy" that focuses on events in the twentieth century, it emphasized once again that we have to explain our position regarding the nature of the Soviet Union and other so-called communist countries. The book is well written and centres on the lives and experiences of families in Russia/USSR, Wales, England, Germany, and the USA. The family members live their lives entwined with the major events of the century. The author's treatment of these events seems reasonably fair even if it doesn't go too deeply into them from our point of view – the plight of the Welsh miners, the class divide in Britain, the Russian revolution, the rise and fall of the Third Reich, the Second World War, the civil rights movement in the US, and the operation of all the governments, especially the White House in volume III, are all there with no knights in shining armour fighting for freedom and democracy.

All institutions are brought to task for their covert and, sometimes, blatantly open actions. East Germany is the backdrop for quite a bit of this third volume and is rightly shown for the oppressive regime it was. Unfortunately, the horrors are all committed by the "communists" with no explanation, of course, of what this actually means. Anyone who reads the book, and many other publications in the same vein, could be forgiven for confusing communism with brutal dictatorship and thanking their lucky stars that they live in the best system, capitalism. In Canada, we have many immigrants and their descendants who believe they have lived under communism and want no part of anything associated with it. Fortunately, for the workers of the world, it is a flawed assessment.

The Soviet Bloc of Eastern Europe never operated as a socialist/communist system. Ditto for China, where any pretence of communism in the country died decades ago, nor Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea, et al. In fact, as far as we are concerned, socialism/communism has never existed, save for that long period in human history when the hunter/gatherers practised a form of primitive communism where all searched for food in the day to the best of their abilities and brought it home to be shared by all according to their needs.

So, if the so-called communist countries are not communist, what are they? First, our definition of socialism/communism is a socio-economic system based on the common ownership of the means to produce and distribute wealth, organized democratically in the interests of all. This means no classes as we are all owners and producers at the same time. There would be no need for buying or trading and thus money would be useless and everyone would simply help themselves to the goods and services they needed from a common store produced by all. With no employers and employees, work would be voluntary just as most of the charities are today.

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How does the “communism” of the USSR compare to this definition? Firstly, the means of production were owned by the state, not the workers, who were forced to show up to earn wages and buy the means of living to survive. Thus the workers did not own this means of production and would have been in trouble had they tried to take home any product, just as in capitalism. In the process, they created a surplus value over and above their wages that was appropriated, just as in capitalism. True, this surplus went to the state but its top officials, the higher echelon members of the Communist Party, and the production managers benefited from using at least some of the surplus for their own luxuries, just as in capitalism. Much of the surplus value also went to a futile and debilitating attempt to match the Americans in the armaments race of the Cold War era with no input from the general population.

The economy was, in effect, controlled by the state and party officials that acted as the capitalist class. Thus the system was very similar to what we see in western capitalism but run by the state, hence we call it state capitalism, as noted by the socialist parties of the World Socialist Movement as early as 1918. For the workers in both eastern and western countries, the effect was much the same although in the west, workers were better off due to the activities of trade unions and a more efficient system producing larger profits and willingness to share a little more of the surplus. The Soviet Union was born in a coup by a small cadre of revolutionaries, and then their will was forced upon the rest, not voted for by the vast majority as we say must happen for true socialism/communism to be established. In the years since the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the western media has been able to paint communism with the broad brush of dictatorship and oppression. One of our major jobs is to promote a better understanding of what really transpired. So, the next time you hear “communism” applied to something, check our definition and decide for yourself how it really stacks up. Better still, read our material, ask questions, come to meetings, listen, speak up, educate yourself. After all, you have nothing to lose but your chains and a world to gain.

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## **CLIMATE CHANGE AND CAPITALISM**

Climate change has been well documented for several decades now. Two hundred of the world’s foremost climate scientists have told us over and over again the fact that it is happening, it is being documented, and human activity is the cause. Therefore, we can do something to change the catastrophe into which we are heading. Although high levels of CO2 have occurred in the history of the planet, they have previously been due to natural causes such as volcanic activity and have taken thousands of years to abate and without adding more and more toxic waste into the atmosphere. Our high levels today have occurred since the industrial revolution and instead of letting the earth heal itself, we are adding more toxins into the mix and there seems to be no end to this process.

There have been many attempts to bring the world’s nations together to produce a blueprint to halt or slow global warming but with two hundred nations, each looking after its own interests of its own capitalist class and its ability to produce maximum profit, progress has been understandably slow. Now, as we stagger from conference to conference to reach a world agreement, another ugly aspect of the capitalist system has raised its head. India has been the darling of the global market in recent years, meaning that it has allowed capital a free reign in setting up highly profitable businesses. Recently, however, like other ‘stars’ in this profit system, it has faltered. Profits have been lower, and capital is withheld until better times return. The leaders of the country are trying hard to modernize and attract that sleeping capital back into the country. For that, they have to beef up the energy sector to provide the necessary infrastructure. It has turned to its greatest energy resource, coal.

The government is determined at all costs to pursue the mining of coal despite the consequences because there is, for them, no alternative. India has the world’s fifth largest reserves of coal but little oil or natural gas production. Chandra Bhushan, deputy director of the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment commented “India is going to use coal because that is what it has.” (New York Times Nov 30, 2015) End of story. In 2014, India mined 512 million tons of coal, and they expect to double that by 2019. In the last five years, coal-fired generating plants have been increased by 73 % and have even imported coal to meet the increased demand. Climate scientists believe that this coal rush could push the world past the brink of irreversible climate change. Incredibly, it will be India that experiences the worst effects of city pollution, increasingly strong storms and damage, and flooding.

In addition, the misery of the people in coal mining country will be worse than it is now. Dhanbad, in the middle of coal country, has a moon-like landscape, mountains of black slag, mercury poisoning, deformed bodies, decaying teeth, and widespread respiratory and skin disorders. The New York Times wrote, "The city of Dhanbad resembles a postapocalyptic movie set, with villages surrounded by barren slag heaps half-observed by acrid smoke spewing from a century-old fire slowly burning through buried coal seams. Mining and fire cause subsidence that swallows homes, with inhabitants' bodies sometimes never found." One would think that, at least, the residents would be well off from all that economic activity and that the government would be stimulated to curtail mining. Of course, neither of these things is true. The people are as poor or worse than most workers in India and, far from reducing coal mining, they are digging deeper to extract more coal. With all this development and expansion, you might think that the country's infrastructure would be vastly improved. To date, three hundred million Indians do not have access to electricity and for many millions more, service is sporadic at best.

Other regions of India are not faring well either. New Delhi has the dirtiest air in the world, worse even than Beijing and Shanghai, China, if that is possible! White surgical masks are becoming ubiquitous and the US embassy there has purchased 1,800 high-end air purifiers for staff members' homes. In Obama's recent visit to the Indian capital, it was estimated that the US president lost six hours from his expected life span! True or not, the air filtration business is taking off as demand soars to escape the choking air. That is, if you can afford such systems, of course! Here, too, efforts to return the economy to former growth levels (read profit) are working against doing anything substantial about air pollution. New Delhi has concentrations of PM 2.5 (particulate matter less than 2.5 microns per cubic metre, deadly because at that size it penetrates deeply into the lungs) on average in December and January of 226 microns per cubic metre. This compares with smoggy Beijing's count of ninety-five microns.

In New Delhi, the culprit is not just coal but the burning of garbage and coal and diesel fuel for transportation and cooking, producing high concentration of toxins such as sulphur dioxide and other carcinogenic compounds. 1.5 million Indians die each year from chronic respiratory diseases, the world's highest. While the government has built the largest solar farm in Asia at a cost of \$148 million, that India is pressing ahead with more of the same seems to be madness until you look at the system that drives such behaviour.

The recent climate talks in Lima, Peru, hosted one hundred and ninety countries and was a chance to get an agreement to meet the minimum requirements to lessen the affects of

climate change and launch the target of keeping warming to no more than two degrees centigrade. The talks stalled as country after country pursued their capitalists' interests over the good of all mankind. The big rift was and continues to be the developing countries (they have been 'developing for decades) and the developed countries, or to put it clearer, between the rich and the poor nations, the exploiters and the exploited. Who, they ask, is going to pay for the programs to curb greenhouse gas emissions. The developing countries feel that the rich countries have had their turn at making huge profits from dirty production and laying large swathes of the earth to ruin. They feel it is now their turn to reap the rewards of their resources and the rich countries should contribute to the new technology required to minimize pollution. The Green Climate Fund, set up to help this cause, stands at \$10 billion but \$200 billion will be required by 2020 to hit the necessary targets.

As one environmentalist said, "With the entire planet on the line, failure is not an option." We have now had twenty years of such meetings and we have not yet reached even a weak agreement that will do anything worthwhile. The Lima meeting asked all countries to send in their programs and targets by March of this year. Canada has not met even that deadline let alone acting on anything. The major problem is that the world is divided up into about two hundred units that compete with each other. Just as we cannot expect one company to act responsibly regarding the environment while in competition with other companies that do nothing, neither can it be expected that one country will do anything significant while others stand by. The money to do something must come from somewhere. It cannot come from workers' wages as they are to buy the necessities to keep him/her working and rearing the next generation of workers. The only extra cash is in the surplus value that the workers produce, i.e. profit. No company, no country, is willing to give up profit and put themselves at a disadvantage in a competitive world.

The Indian situation shows quite clearly that any government is going to ignore the facts, even when they hit close to home, and plough on with dirty production at all costs. Such behaviour is endemic in capitalism. Capital has no feelings and could care less about the environment. It shows the true nature of capitalism. For over one hundred years, workers in the West have told us that we do not need a revolution to change the system as wages and standards of living rose. Nineteenth century conditions endured by our forefathers and their families could never return. Our eroding standard of living in the West today and the situations faced by workers in the 'developing' countries that mirror the worst of nineteenth century conditions, have taught us otherwise. Capital will do whatever it has to do to reap the highest returns and will naturally flow to the lowest wages and standards of safety.

## **JOBS – HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW**

Over the last few years, the oil fields of Alberta has spawned incredible wealth for investors and a fast-growing number of well-paid jobs for workers. It seemed safe and secure. Many workers from all walks of life and all regions of Canada flocked to Alberta to sign up and send money home or save to buy a house or get married. Unfortunately, as is the practice in capitalism, the bottom fell out of the oil market. The US brought so much oil on stream from fracking that, not only was it self sufficient in that most valuable commodity, but it began to flood the market with its surplus. As no one slowed production, the market was awash in oil and prices dropped. As recovering oil from the sticky tar sands of Alberta is an expensive process, once the price of a barrel dropped below a certain level, production was not as desirable and profits dropped.

Today, those well-paying jobs are few and far between. Canada's unemployment figures rose in February as lay-offs caused by the falling oil prices hit Alberta's energy sector. That province's unemployment rate rose to 5.3% as it lost 14,000 jobs, Statistics Canada reported. According to The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce's chief economist, "It's a sign that the shock from oil is starting to hit Canadian economic activity. You really see it in the Alberta numbers with significant job losses and a climb in the unemployment rate." The Conference Board of Canada estimates that Canadian oil companies could lose \$40 billion this year which

would result in further job losses. Obviously, our jobs rest ultimately on the ability of some company or other making enough profit to satisfy investors.

Suncor Energy Inc. said it would cut \$1 billion from its budget and 1,000 jobs; Royal Dutch Shell said that it would cut 5,000 jobs globally including three hundred in Canada; Genovus Energy Inc. will lay off 800 workers, freeze wages and cut expenses such as travel allowances ( a necessary perk for workers who live thousands of miles from their homes);Trican Wells Service Ltd. would lay off six hundred workers. Nationally, the unemployment rate rose from 6.6% to 6.8% as more job seekers entered the market. Also there was a loss of 35,000 part-time jobs, while the private sector lost 17,000 jobs and manufacturing lost 20,000 jobs.

It has been clearly shown that economists who are supposed to know about such matters are as surprised as anyone when these conditions occur. Nor do they know what the future holds. To quote Jonathan Bendiner, economist at Toronto Dominion Bank, "The fact that manufacturing was down so sharply for the month and is still trending lower on a year over year basis is a bit of a head scratcher." The plain fact is that no one can predict how the market will react to any given stimulus and those who try are simply guessing. It's a crapshoot in a casino. Warren Buffet once said." No one knows how a market will go."

Since that's what our jobs and livelihoods depend on, it is not likely that anyone can count on a secure job any more. It makes perfect sense to abolish the entire market system and produce goods based on the real needs of all people.

## **IT'S A DOG EAT DOG WORLD**

Toys 'R' Us, the world's largest toy chain, has to leave its flagship store in Times Square, New York, next year because the rent is too high. The owners of the 110,000 square foot store at the intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue, that includes an indoor Ferris wheel and a mechanical Tyrannosaurus Rex, are not excited at paying \$2,317 per square foot per month. Apparently there have been rapid rent increases in the 'Bow Tie' district that is Times Square and the blocks adjacent to it. This is a high tourist area and retailers wishing to locate there are driving the rents up.

At the time of writing, the company has not signed an agreement to lease new premises nor retain the old one. So, under capitalism, even companies making profits, including world-wide chains, can get screwed by other capitalists. There are no friends or loyalty when it comes to the business of making profits. Quite the opposite, in fact. Companies often spy on each other to gain any advantage that would help their business. This is an indication to us that, if this an example is how business works, we would be better off without it and another reason to vote to end it.

## THE FUTURE OF THE FUTURE

Renowned author of several books, theoretical physicist, Michio Kaku, has put forward a book entitled, “The Physics of the Future” He uses his expertise to interview over three hundred scientists in many fields to predict what we can expect to see by the end of the twenty-first century in topics such as the computer, machines, medicine, nanotechnology, energy, space travel, and wealth. Each chapter looks at the near term (up to 2030), the medium term (2030-2070), and the long term (2070 to 2100).

What is in the works and what is possible is simply astonishing to the layman but if we think what humans achieved in the twentieth century and we know the pace of discovery gets ever faster, the future is only limited by the imagination, and a few other factors related to the type of socio-economic system that is in place.

In computers, Kaku has determined from the experts in that field of research, that we can expect to see the internet available everywhere – on our glasses, our walls, furniture, billboards. In the mid term, it’s quite possible we will see the end of Moore’s law that says computer power will double every eighteen months, causing disruption in production and economic disaster unless replacement technology is found, ushering in a post silicon era. In the long term we will see computers controlled by our minds, telekinesis (movement by thought) and machines everywhere, although Kaku does not see robots taking over as artificial intelligence is a long way off – he writes that robots today cannot cope with pattern recognition and today have the intelligence of cockroaches. Perhaps, the author postulates, we will merge with robots to enhance our physical and mental powers.

In medicine Kaku tells us that there are three stages of medicine – the first one dominated by superstition, witchcraft, and heresy and lasting from ancient times to the nineteenth century; stage two, in that century, saw the beginnings of real science, experiments, medical journals; stage three, molecular medicine, we are entering. In the near future we can expect full readings of everybody’s DNA with more powerful computers, bathroom sensors checking our genes for problems; stem cell technology to grow new parts for our bodies, detecting gene mutations. By the mid term, gene therapy will have advanced enough to create designer children and alter human characteristics and in the long term the cause of ageing, an accumulation of errors at the genetic and cellular level will be, understood. We could, theoretically, live forever and the technology might be used to resurrect past life forms such as the mammoth or neanderthal man.

In the field of nanotechnology, Kaku sees tiny nano machines coursing through the body to target bad cells and deliver medicines accurately only where needed as opposed to chemotherapy of today that destroys everything; nanochips everywhere, in clothing, to constantly monitor our wellbeing; quantum computers using individual atoms, much more powerful than digital computers of today. The CIA wants a quantum computer for code breaking. In the far term the possibility is for the development of a machine that will assemble anything using nanobots.

Regarding energy, new sources will be sought to power space travel, such as solar sail using the fact that light has momentum and can exert pressure; a nuclear rocket powered by atom bombs; ramjet fusion using hydrogen gas scooped from in front of the space ship and mixed and ignited to provide thrust; antimatter rockets – the source of the greatest energy in the universe.

In the chapter on wealth, the author tells us that we will attain mastery over the four forces of nature – gravity, electromagnetism, weak and strong nuclear forces. By the mid term there will be winners and losers as regards work and therefore wealth. Those who perform repetitive work will be replaced by robots. Those involved in pattern recognition such as garbage, police, construction, gardeners, plumbers and those involved in creative work art, software, science will be the winners. There is no provision for the losers mentioned in the book. Presumably they will become the new underclass. Kaku does not, for all his futurism, envisage anything changing, or needing to change in the socio-economic sphere. He sees a perfect capitalism where producers and consumers come together to customize all commodities using 3D measurements carried by the individual on a chip in his/her wallet. As far as nations are concerned, the winners will be those who move to brain power industries and the losers will be those relying on resource extraction. So again, he sees a world divided by national boundaries in a competitive world.

There are obviously some wonderful benefits coming to humanity and the world and the inventions and innovations will only get better. The problem with Kaku’s work is that he has failed to take the economic nature of capitalism into account. He does state early on the need for ‘one world’ but what he means by that or how it is going to be achieved is not stated. For quite a few inventions he stresses the military applications to give one side, presumably his, an advantage over the enemy in some technical aspect but does not see that what one side has today, the other side will have tomorrow, and so on, escalating the efficiency of their killing machines ad infinitum. How are the research projects leading to these advances

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to be funded? Any funds required will have to come from profits and that will severely limit the work and progress made. He believes that, although costs for most projects will be high, the market forces will bring the price down to more affordable levels, but affordable for who? Right now, a huge chunk of mankind cannot afford the technology in housing, health, food etc that we have available today never mind what arrives in the next fifty or one hundred years. Will billions still be on the outside looking in? The growing gap between rich and poor suggests that this will be the case. His explanation of winners and losers, individuals and nations, suggests that inequality is going to exist for a long time. As for the looming problem of global warming, he dismisses it as an economic and political problem, not a scientific one.

I do not doubt that we are capable of delivering the benefits of science to everyone, but I am damn sure it won't be done under capitalism with two hundred competing nations looking toward the economic interests of their capitalist class. Science and research will work better if we have a world system of cooperation and the creation of many more scientists and technicians – a billion more would help and there is enough work for them to do in the many fields suggested here. How about if we have a world without money where the earth and its riches are held in common, by everyone, so projects could go ahead at a faster and surer pace without begging for funding? How about if the benefits are made available to all mankind? It sounds good but not doable in capitalism where any surplus money – profit – must go to the owners and not to the good of humanity. The future of the future is in jeopardy in capitalism. It is only socialism/communism that can deliver the goods, and the sooner we get it the sooner we get on with a decent, sane future for all.



## OBSCENE & HEARD

Capitalism is a crazy system that defies logic at the best of times but it often surpasses even its own standards of insanity. Here are a few examples.

A large tract of land in eastern Toronto started life as a Ford assembly plant where, in 1923, workers were paid \$4 a day, making them the highest paid factory workers in the British Empire. When Ford pulled out, the area became the world's largest shopping mall. Now, as American retail giant, Target, pulls out, almost a century after Ford moved in with the high-paying jobs, even the hope of low-wage, part-time employment is evaporating. One quarter of workers of the east end residents have had to settle for part-time work. A century to achieve this transformation. That counts for progress under capitalism.

You have to hand it to these entrepreneurs, (in my limited French that's a compound word that means 'in between takers' – sounds about right to me) the latest booming business in the US is in mothers' breast milk. Pregnant women and new mothers are pumping the liquid out, feeding their babies and selling what's left over. One mom in the article (New York Times, March 29) has already made over \$2,000. It says, "Breast milk is fast becoming a commodity". Frozen milk is flown to a pharmaceutical factory in California, concentrated into a high-protein product and fed to extremely premature babies in neonatal intensive care units at a cost of thousands of dollars per baby. You can have anything you want in capitalism – as long as you can pay for it!

Naomi Klein, in "The Age of Acquiescence", writes, "For two years running, Oxfam International has travelled to The World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland to make a request: Could the super rich kindly cease devouring the world's wealth? And while they are at it, could they quit using their financial might to influence public policies that favour the rich at the expense of everyone else?" This shows a total lack of comprehension of our current economic system. It is working exactly how it is supposed to work, i.e. the vast majority working to produce profit for the tiny minority of the owners of the means of producing wealth to make them fabulously wealthy while doing absolutely nothing to contribute to the good of everyone. But wait! It gets even worse. She continues, "In 2014, when Oxfam arrived in Davos, it came bearing the (then) shocking news that just 85 individuals controlled as much wealth as half the world's population combined. This January that number went down to 80 individuals." Obviously, begging will not work. Only when we have common ownership of the means of producing

wealth organized democratically in the interests of all, will we solve the problem of inequality.

Life under capitalism gets more ridiculous every day. A woman in Michigan recently shot herself fatally in the eye while adjusting the gun in her bra holster! Yes, this is where women are carrying guns these days! It sounds, and is, crazy but even worse is that people feel the need to carry guns at all. Fear is promoted and that, along with easy access to guns, increases the sale of guns and the profit that goes along with it. Watch this space for the next place to strap on your weapon!

In 2006, Calgary, Alberta, experienced an oil boom. The energy sector was hiring so many people that Calgary's housing market could not keep up with demand. People were buying houses without seeing them. Now, with Suncor cutting one thousand jobs and oil exploration slowing down until prices rise again and make oil production more profitable, housing sales have bottomed out and, in some cases, projects have been halted as many workers head back east in search of employment. Capitalism is endemically a boom and bust economy that has workers running back and forth. It will never change. The only solution is to get rid of it.

After one hundred and seven years making cereal, the Kellogg's plant in London, Ontario, closed down in January with four hundred and fifty workers losing their jobs. Many workers thought they had job security for life. Several generations of workers had been employed there but now the plant is no longer profitable, the workers are no longer needed, and thus they end up on the scrap heap. That's where any worker in any country can go at any time. Future Shop employees turned up for work one day and discovered the stores closed down for good – no notice, no wages owing, nothing. Great system!

We all know that American Republicans are climate deniers even in the face of so much scientific information, even when two hundred of the world's top climatologists tell us what is happening. In Florida, state employees have been allegedly banned from using the term – put your head in the sand and it will go away, ostrich style! The latest strategy for Republicans, when questioned about the topic is to say 'I'm not a scientist'. Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin, who recently declared that he is a former boy scout who 'always thought maybe campsites should be cleaner' was tackled by a by a school boy asking, 'do you care about climate change?' Walker replied, "Ultimately to me, I want to make sure that we all have all the natural resources as possible moving forward just like I've done for everybody in Wisconsin, OK?" Your guess is as good as mine to his meaning.

In an article entitled, "Science fiction winding its way into retail", The Toronto Star printed, "Imagine being able to pay for your goods by walking out of the door without waiting in line at the cash register or providing a password." Science fiction? We imagined that over a century ago. It's called free access!

The Islamic State has been threatening Rome saying, "Today we are south of Rome. We will conquer Rome with Allah's permission." The Italians responded with, 'Be careful on the highway-ring road; there's too much traffic, you would remain trapped!' and 'You're too late, Italy has already been destroyed by its government.' and 'We are ready to meet you! We have nice coliseum plot for sale, accept credit cards securely, bargain price.' That should keep the bastards away!

The New York Times (March 15) reviewed the book, "The Content of Character" in which two black conservatives argue that a sense of victimhood, not social forces, creates problems for African-Americans. Seems that poverty and blatant discrimination that is overt even today never existed!

In the same edition, a review of Erik Larson's "The Last Crossing of the Lusitania" included this quote from Winston Churchill, "(it was)...most important to attract neutral shipping to our shores, in the hopes especially of embroiling the United States with Germany...The poor babies who perished in the ocean struck a blow at German power more deadly than could have been achieved by the sacrifice of a hundred thousand fighting men." Well, I guess he would know having done both!

Comments re an article by Paul Craig Roberts:-

"Ninety per cent control of the media gives government a Ministry of Propaganda, and that is what exists in the United States."

"The idea that the US enjoys free speech is an illusion. The government is restrained from killing its critics by certain laws passed in earlier times but that is being addressed by the NSA. If you look like being a real threat to the system, they turn to their other arm of government, the CIA, to silence you. Assange, Manning, Snowden, plus thousands that would lose their jobs if they spoke out, are a testimony to that. On London's Hyde Park corner, you can say whatever you like because the media barons control the minds of millions, so it doesn't matter...and even if they did there's always the Riot Act."

## WHICH WAY FOR CUBA?

Cuba has been in the news lately because President Obama has made moves to 'normalize' relations between the two countries. This means diplomatic relations will be resumed and at least some free market reforms will be introduced.

The Cuban revolution was a six year attempt by the outlaw forces led by Fidel Castro to gain control of the island from the dictator Batista and his backer, the US. It had been run for decades in a corrupt manner that left very little or nothing for the working class, most of whom lived in abject poverty. Although, perhaps, somewhat left-leaning, it was in no way a communist revolution. On his success in 1959, Castro and his new government had to face some realities. Without US capital, he needed a friendly power to protect himself from the government embargos and CIA plots and attacks from his giant of a neighbour. The USSR came to his economic aid by providing a ready market for Cuba's main export, sugar. Due to this support, Cuba was branded 'communist' to legitimize the attacks on America's avowed enemy. This in no way established socialism/communism in that country (see "What You Need To Know" in this edition).

The revolution was an armed uprising by a small minority of the Cuban population, in no way democratic. For example, Castro governed the country for decades unchallenged and when he was too old to so any longer, he 'handed' power to his younger brother, Raul. Opposition to and criticism of the government was stifled by the threat of jail and by the police. Therefore, the revolution was not established democratically by a class conscious majority of the population who understood and wanted socialism. Castro's brand of governance had to be forced upon the people, no matter how glad they were to see Batista go.

Cuban novelist, Leonardo Padura articulated the frustration of the people against the Cuban government and recently commented, "We've had fifty years of trading insults. Now we have to rebuild the bridges and try to overcome the years of hatred." A truly democratic socialist society would be able to replace all or any deputies acting on their behalf, they wouldn't have to wait fifty years.

While Raul Castro says that every country has the right to choose its own political system (how many Cubans actually chose the form of government they received?) and that no one can claim that improving relations with the United States means Cuba renouncing its ideas, it appears to really mean that the so-called socialist experiment has failed or, at least,

those running the country must bend to the public clamour for modernity and the benefits that others have access to. For example, The New York Times (December 28) notes that on any given day the lines waiting to get overpriced cell phones will be one hundred people deep and they have no access to the internet.

Market capitalism will be a challenge for the free health care and education that the Cuban government has provided for its people. The pressure will be on to privatize these services for the investors to make profits. The price to pay will be steep for the average worker – plenty of jobs, perhaps, but production will likely be one based on more globalized standards with Cuba as a low wage area to attract the needed foreign capital.

Although the revolution may have aimed at ameliorating the lot of the average worker, it remained an undemocratic and often an oppressive regime, and although Cuba is well known for its advanced free health care and education and its leadership in organic farming, it was in no way socialist/communist as we understand it. The lack of a majority that was class conscious and understood and wanted socialism demonstrates the fact that it was not socialist. The government was never able to set up common, democratic ownership of the means of producing and distributing wealth, nor an economy without money and with free access to all goods and services. This, of course, could never have happened in one country – the USSR could never achieve this with its size and resources – as the capitalist economy is world wide and must be replaced with another world wide economy. Like the Soviet Union, Cuba is, at best, an experiment in state capitalism and like the Soviet Union, it will fail and revert to the more efficient private capitalism, unless, that is, we have a world socialist revolution to establish an economy based on the needs of all.





# DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

## THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA HOLDS

### OBJECT

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of society as a whole.

### DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their

democratic control by the whole people.

That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into an agent of emancipation and the overthrow of plutocratic privilege.

That as political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interest of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

The Socialist Party of Canada, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to support these principles to the end that a termination may be brought to the system that deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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## JOHN AHRENS 1911-2014

With great sadness, John Ahrens, friend, educator, mentor, and collegiate comrade of the Socialist Movement, passed away just shy of his 103rd birthday last year. John joined the Socialist Party of Canada in the 1930s (in his native Vancouver) at 666 Homer, narrowly missing, as he stated, volunteering to fight Franco's fascists in the Spanish Civil War. John had been a life-long active member from that period on, hosting numerous visiting Socialist speakers from the United States and United Kingdom at he and his late wife, Marg's, seaside home, "Ahren's Rock," on Indian Arm in the greater Vancouver's Burrard Inlet; he and Marg also hosted talks and comrades at their popular Vancouver book store, Ahren's Books, which they ran from the early 1950s to the 1980s.

Suffice it to say, John was a voracious reader on all subjects relating to human society and natural history -- as was in keeping with most of his comrades during the era. Well informed, incisive, and keen witted, John was never averse to probing controversy or discussion on any topic, but all was in the cause for the Socialist case and advancement of a civilization worth having.

Both John and his wife Marg were close friends with numerous comrades on both sides of the Atlantic, not least among them George Jenkins, Alex Shepard, Jack A. MacDonald, Sam Leight, J. Darcy, Gilmac, Bill Pritchard and Rab, and in the time this writer knew him, Adam Buick, Cyril May and Ken Knight (from the UK).

John Ahrens, and his wife Marg Ahrens, were a unique breed among Socialists. Fastidious record keepers and archivists of all affairs of the Socialist Party of Canada, I believe it fair to say John was among the most knowledgeable and soundest of Socialists to exist. All who encountered he and his wife's generosity were always offered a cup of tea, a place at their table, and safe refuge and company from the all too often encountered mayhem under capitalist existence for Socialist and worker alike.

John's and Marg's company will be greatly missed, the number of Socialists of their calibre being fewer and fewer. When this writer encountered John as a much younger man, recalled is the occasion on which John held out his hand in friendship and warmly stated: "Shake the hand that shook the hand of Karl Marx," referring of course to his meeting James Pritchard (Bill Pritchard's father and a founding member of the original Socialist Party of Canada) at John's bookstore during the 1950s -- James meeting Marx at Fredrick Engels' factory in Manchester where he worked prior to his emigration to Canada. Consoling it is to know, through John's words and life, the spread of Socialist understanding and ideas advance unabated -- generation to generation -- breaking down the fetters capitalism imposes on workers the world over.

J.R. Ames

## POVERTY IN CANADA'S RICHEST CITY

In Toronto, a city of about three million and the financial capital of the country, about half a million live in poverty. The "Vital Signs Report" released in October said that nearly twenty-nine per cent of children in the city, almost 150,000, live in poverty. In some neighbourhoods such as Parkdale and St. James Town, as many as half of the young people were classified as poor.

Ninety per cent of the families with kids in low income apartment buildings live in inadequate conditions and are at the risk of being homeless. Food banks, once unknown in Toronto, are now a fact of life as in many other Canadian cities. During the last six years, they have received more than six million visits annually.

The city has, in its recent budget, allocated \$21 million for various poverty reduction programs. These include two twenty-four hour drop in shelters, the continuation of priority centres and youth lounges, and the elimination of Toronto transit fares for children. Obviously, this is not nearly enough. The increase in transit fares and the inadequate child care policies will only increase poverty for those on the edge.

As part of the city's current poverty consultation process, Toronto Women's City Alliance, Scadding Court Community Centre, and Women's Habitat recently hosted a town hall conversation for women living in poverty. Many participants emphasized the need for employment opportunities, accessible, affordable child care, and affordable housing. While supposedly issuing a poverty reduction program, the city's budget does the opposite. They are financing one new care centre, a housing budget that the city manager, himself, called 'status quo', and have not yet given any word on new subsidized care spaces. According to the director of Toronto City Women's Alliance, "We've really just put out some buckets to catch the leaks instead of repairing the roof."

Nor is there any help forthcoming from outside. The Ontario government has offered to give the city, already drowning in debt, a loan at market interest rates. The trouble is the City of Toronto Act forbids it from using loans to fund operating costs. The federal government has gradually been withdrawing \$1.7 billion in annual funding for social housing across Canada for years.

Women living in poverty are caught between a rock and a hard place. Being unable to afford child care means they cannot work or their low wages will not cover the cost of it. They are trapped, especially single mothers, because they have to choose between paying rent or buying food. This is all the more surprising to many (though not socialists) because some Torontonians are doing relatively well. New research from the United Way says Toronto is now the income disparity capital of Canada, with inequality growing by thirty-one per cent over the last twenty-five years. Our indefatigable friends at “The Toronto – let’s reform capitalism if it kills us – Star” focused on five ‘experts’ who believe that reversing poverty is possible and offered these pearls of wisdom:-

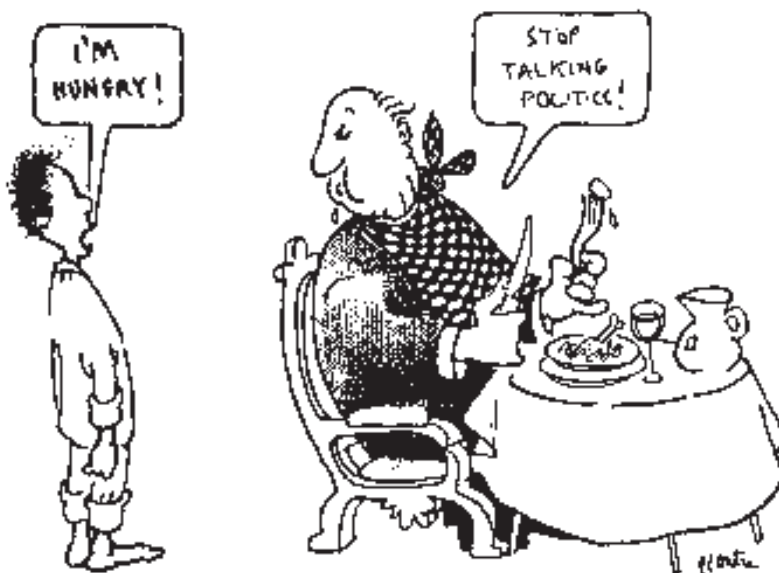
- A Health Alliance Services spokesperson, “The minimum wage needs to be \$14/hour.
- The Toronto & York Regional Labour Council, “The temporary work economy has gone too far. Better models exist in places like Australia where casual employees must be paid 15-20% above minimum wage to compensate for having fewer benefit entitlements.”
- Community Empowering Enterprises wants to see more formal job partnerships between community agencies, schools, and the private sector.
- The YMCA suggested more free youth nights at the Y to help teens build social skills.
- The YWCA said, “Access to affordable child care.”

It is obvious to all these well-meaning people that capitalism cannot be made to work in a manner that will solve the problem of poverty. The very fact that it creates poverty should at least give food for thought. All wealth is created by the application of human labour power on raw materials to produce commodities for sale on the market at a profit. It is the surplus labour-power, that amount over and above the

workers’ wages, created by the worker him/herself, that creates profit (i.e. unpaid labour). Wages are the amount needed to keep the worker and his family in a condition to show up for work the next day. The rest, the surplus labour, goes to those who own the means of production, the capitalists. The lower the wages, the more is appropriated by the capitalist. In other words, it is in the interests of the capitalists to keep wages as low as possible, thus creating the vast inequalities and poverty we have seen from the beginning of the system three hundred years ago. It is an integral part of the system. Wages simply cannot be hiked so that everyone can afford the top quality in food, housing, health, education, and so on, because that extra would have to come from profits and would then make the company taking those lower profits less competitive in the market. Failure would be the result.

In addition, when the market goes down, unemployment is the result, meaning people have not got the money to support their needs. Companies go bankrupt or reduce production leaving the tax base lower for the town and cities and reducing their ability to fund social programs such as alleviating poverty, a vicious cycle that will continue as long as the system does.

The question should be asked, Why should the City of Toronto or any other municipality alleviate poverty at all? It has been clearly shown that all efforts to abolish poverty by all governments at all levels over the last few centuries have been abject failures. But it does not mean that poverty has to be with us forever – just that capitalism will never eliminate it. The obvious conclusion is that capitalism must go and be replaced with a system owned and run by everybody in the interests of all. It is possible as everything needed is already in place and as we, the workers, run the system from the top to the bottom, it would be a simple change. Think about it.



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