

IMAGINE

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correspondence
from our readers.
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Wow! WHAT A DIFFERENCE!

With a federal election coming on October 19th and with the economy as the main issue, it is timely to examine the plans that the major parties have and decide which will be the most capable of getting Canada out of its economic woes.

The Conservatives promise a balanced budget; income splitting for families with children, worth \$2 billion annually; expanded family allowance (universal child care benefit) totalling \$4.4 billion per year; expanded tax free savings account contribution limit to \$10,000 annually; reduced small business taxes; increased support for manufacturing, innovative product development, and job training; expanded free trade agreements in Europe, Asia, and other regions; study ways for Canadians to make voluntary add-on contributions to the Canada Pension Plan (but they refused to support Ontario's attempts to start up its own pension plan).

The Liberals say they will reduce income taxes for the middle class, defined as those with incomes between \$44,700 and \$89,400 a year; raise income taxes for those making over \$200,000 annually; create the Canada child benefit combining the Conservatives' family allowance program and other federal assistance plans with the aim of increasing overall family benefits for most families; cancel the Conservatives' income-splitting tax measure and increase the tax-free savings account annual contribution limit; increase Canada Pension Plan benefits; cancel the Conservatives plan to raise the age of eligibility for Old Age Security Benefits.

The New Democrat Party's program would be to cancel income splitting and use the savings to create, along with the provinces, a \$15 a day National Daycare Program; raise corporate income tax rates; reduce small business taxes; cancel the Conservatives' increase in the tax free savings account annual contribution limit to \$10,000 from \$5,500; keep the expanded family allowance; reinstate the \$15 an hour minimum wage; increase Canada Pension Plan benefits; cancel Conservative plans to raise the age of eligibility for Old Age Security benefits.

The Green Party claim they will create jobs through investment in renewable energy, expanding passenger rail, retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency, and infrastructure improvements.

When one compares these programs it is obvious the three main parties are simply tinkering with taxes as rival banks or phone companies tinker with slightly different benefits that make it difficult or impossible to compare. Taxes, as they must in a money system, will continue to exist. The NDP will raise corporate taxes, so corporations will continue to exist, and reduce taxes for small businesses, so business will still exist. Ditto for family allowances, minimum wages, old age security benefits, and so on. Thus, all the parties are simply pledging to uphold the status quo – the wage system, the appropriation of surplus value, and the inequality between those who produce and do not own and those who own but do not produce. In other words, there is little or no difference between them all.

Nor does it make sense to vote for the Greens who have made no statements concerning taxes, benefits, allowances etc. To attempt to save the environment from destruction within society as it is presently constituted is sheer folly.

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Pollution and global warming are world problems and require a world solution. The very life blood of capitalism is the profit motive and anything that interferes with its production will be fought and ignored by capital and the politicians of all parties that exist to run capitalism.

Even within capitalism it is doubtful if the plans advocated above concerning taxes and benefits would be workable with so many companies going out of business or moving to places with lower taxes, laws and a 'flexible' work force leaving a growing number of unemployed who do not pay taxes and receive benefits. Capitalism is a global system and the ups and downs of the global market will affect every country, leaving little to be done nationally. When the market improves, i.e. profitability returns, capital will be invested again and the wheels of the economy will start turning. Until then, we simply await the pleasure of capital to work and become solvent.

The fact that the parties cannot solve the problems we face doesn't mean those problems are unsolvable. It would mean a social and economic revolution and the establishment of a socialist system, a society based on the common ownership of the means to produce and distribute wealth in the interests of all, production for use, not profit, and free access for all to all goods and services produced by society. Money would be of no use and wages, allowances and benefits would not be an issue and political parties, manifestations of a class system would be a thing of the past. The Socialist Party of Canada recommends not voting for any party that does not adhere to our Declaration of Principles and to mark your ballots with "World Socialism."

The following pamphlet will be of use in expanding this idea.

*Fed up of
listening to the
same old
politicians
making the same
old promises and
nothing ever
happening to solve
our problems?*

Then read on...

We live under a capitalist world-wide social and economic system that is based on the private ownership of the means of producing and distributing wealth, i.e. the land, the resources, the factories, the transportation systems, etc. They are owned by a tiny minority of super rich people. That's right! The world's riches are owned and controlled by a privileged few. They always aim, and succeed, in running the system in their interests. The rest of us are forced to sell our mental and physical powers in order to survive. That is, when their capital is pretty sure of making a profit. If not, we are out of luck and out of a job. As we toil, we not only produce a value equal to our wages, but extra value above that, which is taken by the owners and is the sole source of profit, i.e. our unpaid labour. So we have two groups – those who own but do not produce, and those who produce but do not own.

The modern nation-state developed to support this system – large countries with clearly defined and defended borders, a strong central government to enact the laws to support private property, a legal/prison system to deal with dissenters, a police force and an army to keep control of the citizens and be ready to go to war when the interests of its capitalists are threatened by the interests of other capitalist groups in other parts of the world. Anyone sent to parliament, no matter how good their intentions, must fall into line and vote as told by the party hierarchy who control a majority of the seats. Each party has nominal differences but all will support the status quo. Thus, nothing will get into law that proposes dramatic changes,

even if it happens to be the right thing to do.

Ever wonder why no progress is made on fighting pollution and climate change, apart from a little tinkering and ever-moving targets that never get achieved? Dirty production is cheap production and maximizes profits. Ever wonder why the Third World never becomes the Second or First World? The capitalists of the Northern Hemisphere got a head start and they won't relinquish their privileged position. The Southern Hemisphere is too profitable and exploitable to give up. Furthermore, the normal operation of a profit system organized in the interests of the privileged few is responsible for: - Constant conflict and war – brought about by the competition between enterprises and countries over land, resources, markets, strategic positions, changing alliances.

Poverty

– As the owning class take the lion's share of the wealth produced by all, then many will have to go without some necessities.

Pollution and degradation of the environment

– the less money spent on clean technology and clean practices, the more profit is realized.

Shoddy goods

– Price is the battleground of competing interests. The only way to make a commodity cheaper and win the battle is to reduce the amount of labour (higher productivity) or cheapen the elements used in production. Besides, shoddy goods wear out faster and need to be replaced more. To produce a first-

class commodity that would last a lifetime would be a disaster for capitalist production.

Deprivation of the necessities of life

– The absolute poverty of billions in the Third World, even including thousands dying of malnutrition on a daily basis is well documented.

There is absolutely no reason for any of this. There is enough food, medicine, and building materials and know-how to look after everybody adequately. Only the inability of some people to pay and thus realize a profit for investors allows this blight on the human race. Racism – Capitalism, by its very nature, fosters and encourages hostility between members of the working class, which is exacerbated by the competition for jobs, resources, and necessities of life. This is heightened by propaganda that teaches hatred for him/her simply by being black or white, jew or gentile, catholic or protestant. The list is endless but it is a fact that the worker in North America has more in common with a worker in New Zealand than with a capitalist in his hometown. Only with the abolition of capitalism will the reasons for racial prejudice disappear.

Capitalism has been a necessary step in human development. It has created a massive productive capacity capable of fulfilling the needs of all. Unfortunately, this system is incapable of delivering and servicing everyone's needs. No profit, no production. Unable to pay? Too bad, do without. Reforms, new laws, changes to the system will have no effect on its overall operation, nor on its conse-

quences. Capitalism is past its best-before date. It is time to move to the next step and move human progress to a new level, to free ourselves from the yoke of capitalist production. We need a system based on the common ownership of the means of producing and distributing wealth, organized democratically in the interests of all mankind. This system, socialism, is production to meet needs, not for profit. Since the land, resources, factories, etc. will be held in common, belonging to everyone, the need for competition is eliminated, along with conflict and war. Since we all will own, there will be no owner and non-owner classes. As the profit system disappears, so too does the need for money, trade, and markets, to be replaced by free access for all from a common store of goods produced by the voluntary labour of everybody. And since many of today's jobs will be unnecessary in a socialist society (finance, advertising, military, armaments manufacture etc.) many more will be able to become producers thus greatly reducing the time needed to work and increasing the leisure time for all.

To sum up, we have a system of immense productive power capable of satisfying the needs of all humanity, yet we are faced with billions of people living with poverty, insecurity, homelessness, malnutrition and deprivation. The conflicts between groups of owners can, and often do, lead to war, surely the most disgusting aspect of the human experience. It is a system incapable of working in the interests of the majority. The only alternative is a system of common ownership and democratic management. Socialism will not be perfect, it is not utopia, but it

will immediately solve our worst problems and ensure that other problems will receive the attention and reasoned scientific discussions they deserve without a profit/money bias and the two-faced bickering we see from our so-called leaders today. Is such a system possible? Of course, we already have the means to accomplish this and we, the majority, are the ones who do all the work and keep the system going anyway. To do this, we need a strong majority of people who understand and want a socialist society, for it must, above all, be a democratic process. Are you willing and able to help bring it about?

If you would like more information, or to receive a free introductory package, or donate to the cause of promoting socialism, please contact:

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A REALITY CHECK

The United States has been the destination of millions of immigrants from every country in the world for over a hundred years. Many are escaping poverty, political or religious oppression, lack of land or opportunity, and so on. Although most did not really believe the streets were paved with gold, all hoped for opportunities to build a better life. It was the best that capitalism had to offer. Some were lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time and were able to seize an opportunity to become wealthy, but for most the reality was a slum life in the tenements of New York, Boston, or Philadelphia, as bad or worse than what they had left.

No place said gold, or wealth, or opportunity more than California. If you couldn't become rich through hard work or

chance, you could always become a movie star. The picture of sun, surf and sand has become somewhat tarnished in recent times but the story of the city of San Bernadino is particularly shocking. Located about one hundred kilometres east of Los Angeles, it is one of California's oldest settlements having been established by Mormons in 1851. A transportation crossroads, the city grew to become a nice middle class town with steady blue collar jobs with good pay. It was the birth place of McDonalds and Taco Bell, and designated an all-American city by the National Civic League in 1976.

The last thirty years has seen its economic implosion. The railway shops and the steel works closed and the Norton Air Force base closed. It is now the poorest city of its size in the state and

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the second poorest nation-wide after Detroit. As in many cities, the cost of policing and fire prevention has become untenable taking up seventy-two per cent of the budget, mainly in wages and pensions. Add to this the 2008 recession and the bursting of the housing bubble – San Bernadino had a foreclosure rate 3.5 times the national average – and you have a recipe for disaster for the workers. As always, capital doesn't wait around to suffer, it moves to greener pastures and leaves the mess.

Now, only forty-six percent of residents of working age have jobs and fifty-four per cent rely on public assistance. The 2013 median family income was \$37,440 and in some parts just \$15,000, the lowest in the state. The city has filed for bankruptcy protection. Unlike Detroit, the population continues to grow attracting immigrants, parolees, and gang members who can't afford to live anywhere else in California. Drugs like methamphetamines have become so common that downtown doughnut shops sell glass pipes and torches.

Is this the classic case of capitalism walking away from an area of no more use to them and leaving wasteland of human misery? Not quite. Like sharks circling a wounded prey, capital has returned, sort of, in the form of giant warehouses for companies such as Amazon.com, Pep Boys, and Kohls, but, as you may guess, it's work with a nasty twist. The work is casual, on a day to day basis. Many warehouses text employees to let them know what shifts are available for the next day and the worker has just a few seconds to respond by typing in a code or lose that day's work and pay. One worker interviewed whose shift ended at 5am was still awake in the afternoon watching his phone for news of the next day's shift. He makes \$12 an hour and often gets only a single shift in the week. This is the electronic equivalent of the dirty thirties when men showed up for work at the factory gates hoping to be picked and the boss's lackey would decide who would work and eat that day and who would not. Of course, if you were a trouble maker, someone who spoke up for workers' rights or safety, or talked union, then there would be many days without food. In other words, economic terrorism.

To hear of such a method of hiring workers in 2015 in the richest country in the world is to vindicate all those, such as the World Socialist Movement, who say that capitalism cannot fundamentally change and can never, never work in the interests of all humankind. Socialism can. Capitalism was meant to work for those with money to be invested as capital with a return greater than the investment to continually enrich the investor. It is working wonderfully. The San Bernadino lesson also proves that reform is not the answer, sweeping away this system altogether is. For the people of San Bernadino the American dream has long been lost and replaced by a nightmare caused entirely by the capitalist mode of production.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN A CAPITALIST SOCIETY

Socialists hold that the modern nation state developed to support the capitalist mode of production. The modern state has clearly defined and strongly defended borders and a central government with the authority to create binding national laws and command an army and police force to enforce them. A national armed force and police forces are put in place to keep control inside those boundaries. Such states were not necessary for feudal economies, being mainly local in character. Thus most of the world and especially Europe, from which capitalism arose, was a mosaic of small kingdoms, principalities, and duchies. Britain and France transformed early and easily into unified modern states and left other European powers such as Germany and Italy behind as the Industrial Revolution heralded the coming of capitalism and the entry of highly efficient and productive economies. Their national navies and armies were generally superior to those of the smaller kingdoms leaving them to colonize at will. Attempting to catch up by the Germans, and failing to do so, was a major cause of two world wars.

With power to legislate, capitalism acquired legitimacy from its governments. It was quite legal to steal millions in the appropriation of the workers' surplus value, but a crime for a hungry person to take a loaf of bread worth a few pennies. The judicial/prison system was there mainly to keep the working class in line with the demands of capitalism and crush dissenting voices – needed workers were cleared off their lands and forced into factory work, children hardly able to stand were usable factory fodder, unions discouraged by combination laws, and so on.

So it is no surprise to read of the Indian government's treatment of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in that country. India's and the world's capitalist class have discovered a lucrative source of profit in the last few decades – cheap labour. With no unions and a workforce on the edge of starvation and absolute poverty living in miserable conditions, and the compliance of the national government, maximum surplus value can be extracted with little opposition, compared to the more organized workforce in the First World. India must, however quickly upgrade its infrastructure, lacking and neglected for centuries, up to modern standards to attract the vast investment needed for a country with the world's second largest population.

In "India Cracking Down on Greenpeace" (Toronto Star, June 14, 2015), we see, yet again, how governments will act when chasing capital's holy grail, profit. As we learned in the Spring 2015 issue of "Imagine", India has large pollution problems – New Delhi has the dirtiest, unhealthiest air quality in the world. Coal is India's major resource and the government intends to double production from the 2014 amount of 512 million tons by 2019, just five years! 1.1 million Indians die each year from chronic respiratory diseases. The government's ignoring of this problem and its aggressive, polluting actions

has brought a storm of protest from many NGOs and the government has struck back to silence them. Greenpeace has been described as 'a threat to national economic security and its officials have been refused entry into the country. Its offices are under constant inspection and its bank accounts have been frozen. It appears the crackdown on this world wide organization is a warning to other NGOs to cease and desist their opposition to progress at any cost. Imagine, the nerve of these people trying to save lives and working for sustainable development!

The pro development Indian government (is there any other kind in the capitalist system?) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi means aggressive, intrusive building of new mines and coal-fired and nuclear plants that are strongly opposed by Greenpeace. Make no mistake though, this policy of development and attacking the critics was started by the former government of the Congress party. In other words, it doesn't make any difference who is in charge, capital must be served at the expense of the people. Almost 9,000 foreign-funded non-profit organizations have had their licences revoked for allegedly failing to disclose financial sources and respected groups such as 350.org and The Sierra Club are on a watch list. The government sees the opposition by these groups as funded by 'foreign donor interests' as if there is something nefarious about them, rather than listening to what they have to say. Greenpeace is a very large organization with offices in forty countries and has the backing of millions of dollars from donors around the world, so the claim by the government is partly true. We are, though, in a world system and world solutions are required to the major problems of pollution and global warming. What happens in one region affects the whole world. This, of course, is where capitalism falls down because international agreements are next to impossible to attain with little chance of targets being adhered to due to the competitive nature of the system. Everyone has to look after their own interests. Purely Indian organizations, however, are small and relatively poor and are not able to cope with government clampdowns on their freedom to operate in the same way that Greenpeace can, e.g. hiring lawyers to challenge governments.

Although India is often called the world's largest democracy, the voice of the ordinary citizen, as elsewhere, is neither sought nor considered. If capital demands infrastructure for the purpose of making profits, then so be it. If the spin off from all this is to provide electricity for the 300 million Indians who do not have it, then that is all well and good, but the government priority remains synonymous with capital's priority, not the people's. For example there is no such dynamic activity to provide proper sanitation, housing, health, or education for the masses. Thus socialists draw the conclusion that the state central government is a creation of and a supporter for, the capitalist system and it would therefore disappear, along with the state, its army, and its borders in a socialist society.

As a post script to this article, I received, via email from a comrade the following:-

Reference www.canadianprogressiveworld.com/2015/07/30/wikileaks-reveals-cbc-and-canada-post-may-be-sold-under-tpp-agreement/

The tpp is The Transpacific Partnership, the CBC is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

This article from a Canadian perspective describes the TPP trade agreement currently being negotiated and outlines (through information from Wikileaks) the next step in the world-wide control by the capitalist class over the nation state (that purportedly represents the interests of the citizen).

For Canada, among other things, it sets up the sale of the CBC and Canada Post to private concerns so that the services provide profit for the private owners. "To privatize something, one has to show investors they will actually get a return." An excellent example is "The Canadian Wheat Board, privatized by the government in 2012. The CWB is now owned by G3 Global Grain Group, a Winnipeg based-partnership between US agribusiness giant Bunge Ltd. and Saudi Arabia's SALIC Canada Ltd...

SALIC Canada Ltd. Is "a subsidiary of Riyadh-based Agriculture and Livestock Investment Company, Saudi Arabia's main agriculture investment vehicle.

This is an excellent example of Karl Marx's explanation of capitalism and the ultimate centralization of capital (and control) into fewer and fewer hands. It's also another example of how these moves are facilitated with the collusion of governments.

NO NEED TO WAIT AND SEE

In June, the City of Toronto council outlined their twenty-year plan to abolish poverty in Canada's largest city. The present situation is grim, as the following statistics attest – twenty-nine per cent of children currently live in poverty, as do thirty per cent of disabled people, thirty-three per cent of people from ethnic groups, thirty-seven per cent of single mothers, and forty-six per cent of recent immigrants.

The highlights of the council's ambitious undertaking are as follows – to create financial incentives to build more affordable housing; to expand dental care for low-income residents; to plan transit expansion to ensure equal access to reliable services; to increase access to public land for community gardens; to become a living wage employer and require city contractors to pay their workers a living wage.

The report, called "The Toronto Prosperity Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy", states, "It is unacceptable that, in a city as prosperous as Toronto, people cannot meet their basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, and transportation." According to Deputy Mayor, Pam McConell, who is responsible for the city's poverty file, "What is before us today is the path to move forward. The next step is to look at the funding of that path both today and over the next twenty years and make sure we have

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the tools available to measure progress every step of the way.” She was at least realistic enough to say, “Eradicating poverty is probably not achievable, but it is possible to have strong safety nets to ensure people do not fall into poverty and that when they do there are lifelines to pull them out.”

Ms. McConnell also noted that the city cannot do it alone but needs collaboration with the federal and provincial governments, business, labour, and community organizations. One must seriously wonder to what extent cash-strapped governments and profit-minded businessmen will help. Nor is it pessimistic to wonder if councils elected in the next twenty years will make up whatever changes they see fit to continue. Recently the provincial Liberal government abandoned its poverty reduction program with the recession as an excuse. No one need doubt the good intentions of the Toronto Council, but we do not have to wait twenty years to see if their plans work.

Poverty always has, and always will be, endemic to the capitalist mode of production because its fundamentals of ownership of the means of producing and distributing wealth by a tiny minority, appropriation of the surplus value of the worker, production for profit, and the market driven economy. This point always seems to be missed by the likes of those in power. When markets are up and production increases, the level of poverty decreases though never disappears. When production slows and a recession occurs, unemployment and poverty increase. If capital does not need the worker i.e. cannot extract sufficient surplus value from him/her, then there will be fewer jobs available. No government can change these facts or can make the system work in the interests of all or it would have surely done so by now. The most a government can do is lessen the effects, but any such gains can easily be wiped out, and often are, by the next party in power.

Though the fundamentals of capitalism remain, there have been different forms of governments administering it. None have been able to eliminate poverty. A typical example is the welfare state introduced into Britain by the Labour government of 1945-51. There have been democratically elected governments and dictatorships, governments of the Left, Centre, and Right. Some have been well-meaning with good intentions and some have been decidedly pro business and anti-labour. Some have been state capitalist and some with mixed economies. The plain fact is that no government whatever its form and intentions, whether municipal, provincial, or federal, has been able to eliminate poverty, nor will they be.

There is one way, and one way only that it can be done – by the world’s working class becoming the owners of the tools of production in common and by establishing free access for all managed by a democratic council, truly a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

CORRESPONDENCE – RECEIVED VIA MAIL

The Spring 2015 Imagine has lots of interesting points to toss around – an excellent issue. I have just one observation:

Mark Lynas, in his 2007 book, *Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet*, makes it pretty plain that an Earth that has become more than two degrees Centigrade warmer is already pressing the limits of human civilization. More than two degrees, and humans might arguably survive but with a decreasing likelihood of preserving the gains achieved in the past. We would be looking at the end of history, and that is no mere literary conceit; indeed, we would find ourselves on the brink of undoing our own evolution. Over six degrees and we are looking at possible extinction.. If, as you point out in *Climate Change and Capitalism*, the world’s 190 governments have spent decades squabbling over who is going to pay for curbing global climate change and have nothing to show for it, that clearly suggests that capitalism is incapable of expunging the profit motive from its thinking. Given that our future as a species and the viability of our habitat are on the line, it doesn’t require a degree in rocket science to grasp that capitalists as a group are mentally deficient, somewhat like putting a five-year-old in charge of a jet liner.

Then we come to the case of Michio Kaku writing about *The Physics of the Future* (Reviewed in *The Future of the Future*). “Futurologists’ as they are called, have always been notorious for spurning the complications of the real world, so I am ordinarily inclined to take their predictions with a grain of salt. But Kaku apparently shortchanges ‘economic and political problems’ in a way that undermines the viability of his own arguments.

First, as you point out, there are the real constraints imposed by the capitalist organization of society, which will rule out virtually every outcome that fails the test of compatibility with profit. Capitalism can never take us to a world without profit. Second, if time is running out on the race to stem the worst effects of climate change, it is just a matter of time before the two curves cross and the institutions of scientific progress are forced to begin shutting down. Between rising ocean levels and global temperatures, agriculture will arguably fail to feed the world’s still growing populations. Quite apart from the wreckage of the institutions underpinning markets, large numbers of people will succumb to famine, further undermining the ability of agriculture to feed every one, not to mention the working abilities of huge numbers of people. People who can’t eat can’t work. Likewise: no food, no science.

All of this will take only as long as it takes the planet to heat up more than three or four degrees Centigrade. In the worst

case scenario, this could conceivably happen by the beginning of the next century, with or without geoengineering.

A sobering thought: the mighty human conquest of the forces of nature could crumble into unmemorable dust in less than a century, with no one to even know we were ever here. Those who voice confidence in our beating the odds are too often the same ones who complacently tolerate the failure of the capitalist class, working through its governments, to deliver us from the evils they have so triumphantly been pushing on us. I think the reviewer if anything understates the question in the last paragraph. But it is certainly true that only majority rejection of production for profit, specifically capitalism's employment system, will open the door to the future. A realization that will have to sweep around the globe like a thunderclap, and within our children's lifetime.

Ron Elbert, World Socialist Party, USA

REPLY

We entirely agree, as do all socialists, that the profit system not only cannot, will not, act uniformly in any meaningful way, to tackle the problem of climate change, but is itself the cause of this dilemma. Given also, that it can never operate in the interests of all humans, the way forward, our possible bright future, can only be achieved by replacing the profit system and establishing a socialist system. And you are quite right, we can never overestimate the problem of climate change and the imperative to act now.

It is also easy to see that climate change or even any environmental discourse is lacking in most election discourses, including our own federal election.

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POVERTY, A SCOURGE OF CAPITALISM

A doctor with a conscience, reported The Toronto Star, realizing that poverty and ill health are connected, decided to try to mitigate the effects of low income on health. To publicize his campaign, he examined dozens of poor people on the lawns of Queen's Park, the site of the Ontario Legislature. He filled in the special diet forms that would bring an extra \$250 per month for food to add to the miserly \$500 welfare payment. The government responded by tightening the regulations by requiring doctors to diagnose patients with a specific disease requiring 'special diets'. The good doctor, though, had come to the conclusion that poverty made people sick and that doctors had the power to intervene directly. He and some of his colleagues formed The Health Providers Against Poverty group.

It is a plethora of conditions that results in poverty impacting health – insecure housing or homelessness; unstable employment; social exclusion; food insecurity; lack of education or job skills. Poverty means that people are unable to pay to get to a doctor or a hospital when treatment is needed or are unable to pay for prescriptions. Now there is a term for this, 'social determinants for health'. Consequently, the sick do not get treatment and that compounds their poor health. Our doctor cites one homeless person he treated who suffered from multiple medical conditions and, at forty-two years of age, had the body of a seventy-five year-old.. The doctor said, 'The most I could hope for him was to have a decent meal and move him into something like a palliative care program.' He also devised pamphlets for doctors on how to treat poverty and he works part time at St. Michael's Hospital Family and Community Medicine department.

This hospital has an impressive array of specialists and programs for those 'falling through the cracks', and there are many cracks in the current system. After a check-up, participants receive financial help such as filling out Ontario disability forms, finding affordable child care, locating the nearest food bank, filing for bankruptcy, and applying for Old Age Security payments; the social worker will, working with the clinic's psychologist, help with anxiety, depression management, and even offer emergency food vouchers; the legal aid department will help with issues such as landlord disputes, abuse, sexual assault, and immigration challenges. The clinic also provides books to increase child literacy, and an employment program is in the works.

However, laudable as these efforts are, and they are very necessary in today's society, it is easy to see that such a program at one hospital, like the constant appeals from organizations to help the poor, are totally inadequate to

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alleviate poverty on any meaningful scale, not to mention eradicate it all together. The alternative thinking is to turn it around and say why do we have poverty or cracks in the system at all. To look at it that way requires a whole different set of questions and answers. From where does poverty arise? Do we have so little wealth in the world that large numbers of humans must go without, be deprived of the necessities of life, even die for lack of food or medical attention? Why is it that some have so much wealth they could never spend it in several lifetimes and others lack those necessities?

Hunter/gatherer societies did not have poverty as we know it. Everyone was able to participate in the gathering of food and partake in the results. No one brought back a large animal and kept it to himself because it was the sharing that guaranteed the continued existence of all. The advent of villages, towns, cities, and empires saw the rise of the phenomenon of private property and the uneven distribution of wealth, inequality, and the stratification of society into owners and non-owners. Whoever owned the land and its products, controlled and dominated those who did not own. The structures of society that grew up supported, legalized, and confirmed that inequality. In our modern system, those who own the means of producing and distributing wealth, i.e. the land, the resources, the factories, the transportation systems, have great wealth that continues to amass exponentially. Those who do not own must earn the necessities of life by selling their labour-power to the owners. Those with particular skills necessary to the production of profit may be reasonably comfortable, others not so much. Profit in the capitalist system arises from the labourer's surplus labour – the difference between what the worker gets paid and the total value he imparts into the commodities he helps to produce. That difference is expropriated by the company and used to pay dividends to the investors/owners, pay rent, interest, and reinvest in the business to keep it competitive and therefore efficient at producing profit. Thus it is the unpaid labour of the workers that pays the dividends to the owners who receive that money for doing nothing or providing no equivalent, and that pays for the reinvestment and upgrades. Thus today's production infrastructure and factory system and the great wealth of the owners is paid for by the surplus labour of the previous years.

Given all this and the vast ability of our present system, one would think that there would be enough wealth to go around, and there is! Unfortunately, distribution of wealth in the capitalists system is the sole prerogative of the capitalist class itself, aided and abetted by the laws of the land as created and enforced by the legislatures. It is a crime for a worker to take home any object he has helped to make, no matter how small or worthless, but it is perfectly legal for any company to steal the fruits of the workers' labour by the millions and billions.

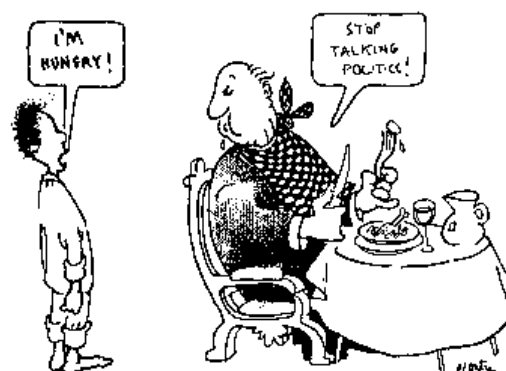
What has all this got to do with poverty? Obviously, the capitalists will take the lion's share for themselves and pay

the workers as little as possible – the less that goes to the worker, the more received by the owning class. If this were not true, squabbling over one's share, yearly bargaining, and strikes would be unnecessary. The competitive and greedy nature of capitalism creates the tendency to try to drive wages down as close to zero as possible and leave the profit share as high as possible, keeping investors happy and the enterprise competitive. Thus, compared to the owners, all workers will always be in relative poverty, and wealth accumulation by the capitalists means that the gap will generally continue to grow. Today, the eighty wealthiest people on the planet own as much wealth as the bottom half, three and a half billion!

The people who the good doctor helps are mostly those who have difficulty measuring up to the adjective 'profitable'. They form a vast body of workers, Marx's 'Reserve Army', who can be called upon to man the machines when demand is high and production is ramped up for an expanded market, while it lasts. When demand falters, they are let go to rely again on the welfare system. Some, due to mental and physical problems can't even make this group and will require the meagre handouts provided by the state for life. But, make no mistake, even those 'good, steady' jobs can and do disappear overnight and the highly skilled worker of today can be working a minimum wage job tomorrow. We all work at the pleasure and dictates of capital – profit prospects low, no work, no pay.

Socialism by contrast will be a cooperative system of producing for needs, not profit. All products would go to a common store to be accessed freely by all according to their self-determined needs. There will be no poor, no one unable to access the medical system, or food, or education, or housing, and if jobs disappeared due to mechanization or low demand, existing work would be shared and all necessities would always be available to all in any case.

So, while we must admire the compassion and effort of the good doctor and the program at St. Michael's hospital, we socialists say why stop at helping a few dozen when poverty around the world and other human needs can be addressed by dumping our present economic system, capitalism, geared to the few, and establishing socialism, geared for 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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OBSCENE & HEARD

We all know that capitalism is a crazy system but it can still amaze us with the depth of its stupidity. Here are some examples:-

To date, sixty million people have been forced from their homes due to war, instability, poverty, repression and persecution, and environmental causes. A mark of success that only capitalism could aspire to! (The Toronto Star, July 5, 2015)

According to a letter to the editor (Toronto Star, July 4, 2015) there are more food banks in Canada, one of the rich countries, than there are McDonalds restaurants. We always knew that under capitalism one of the fastest growing industry was the food bank but how far is this going to go.

“Foreign Brands Outpace US Stores” read the headline in The New York Times July 5,2015). Apparently, new, cheap, and foreign brands like H & M, Uniqlo, and Zara have taken market share from established brands such as The Gap, J.Crew, American Apparel, and Abercrombie & Fitch who have all reported slumping sales. The Gap, once so cool that actress Sharon Stone once wore one of its turtlenecks to the 1996 Oscars (just how cool can you get!), is now announcing the closing of 675 stores over the next few years. This is the old story in capitalism – as one star falls, another rises, but it means loss of jobs or displacement for thousands and, stupidly, the building of hundreds of new stores, while trashing a similar number of others at a tremendous social cost that could easily be avoided by throwing out the competitive system.

In a similar vein, Sobeys Inc, the food giant, has announced the closing of its warehouse in Milton, Ontario and the loss of four hundred unionized jobs. A spin doctor for the company said, “While we have announced our decision, it will be several months before transition activities will begin. In the meantime, supporting our employees is our top priority.” They don’t even have the decency to say our top priority is making profit and if we have to fire employees to do it, that’s what we have to do. That would be too close to the truth.

A second letter to The Star said, “Your editorial lavished praise on the new twenty-year anti-poverty strategy. I was troubled that the incidence of poverty in our city has doubled since the 1970s despite the heroic efforts of many private and public initiatives to alleviate this condition. In 1988, there was an all-party resolution in the House of Commons to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. This led to the formation of Campaign 2000 to bring about this goal. Yet here we are in 2015 and child poverty has increased.” He goes on to recommend a guaranteed income for all but fails to realize that the cost would have to come out of profits and therefore is a non-starter. But how crazy is this system that children have to be deprived, not only of things they need, but of opportunity to experience life to the full?

A politician’s quote, “Deficits are not always financial, sometimes there are deficits in what we promised to do.” No kidding!

How crazy is the income gap between the haves and the have nots? The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (just needing an organization with that title is crazy in itself!) reported in May that between 2008 and 2013 the real average disposable income of the top ten per cent rose by 10.6% while that of the bottom ten per cent dropped 3.2%. One hundred and fifty years ago, Marx said the amount of the world’s wealth apportioned to the working class would rise but the part that the capitalist class received would grow even greater in proportion. He deduced this by looking at the workings of the capitalist mode of production, so any attempt to eradicate poverty or to advocate for income equality cannot happen while this system lasts.

World military spending has reached \$1.7 trillion (US) per year with the US spending about one third of that total, \$610 billion. These figures are staggering by themselves but to contemplate the good use that kind of money could be used for and is not – food and health care for all, for example – is the height of capitalist madness. Obviously, it’s more important to pour money and resources, both human and material, into killing humans than to looking after them. Obscene, indeed.

The second atom bomb dropped was on the city of Nagasaki. “In Life After Nuclear War” by Susan Southard, we learn some of the horrific details, “A woman who covered her eyes from the flash lowered her hands to find that the skin of her face had melted into her palms. Hundreds of field workers and others staggered by, moaning and crying. Some were missing body parts, and others were so badly burned that even though they were naked, Yoshida couldn’t tell if they were men or women. He saw one person whose eye balls hung down his face, the sockets empty,” According to General Leslie Groves, the director of the Manhattan project, testifying before The United States Senate, death from high doses of radiation was ‘without undue suffering’, and indeed ‘a very pleasant way to die’. Regard for human life and suffering has never been high in this system, it got its starting seed money from the slavery trade.

Bending history – Senator Marc Rubio once declared, according to The New York Times (August 16), “We have never been a nation of haves and have-nots. We are a nation of haves and soon-to-haves, of people who have made it and of people who will make it.” I wonder how he explains away the millions living in poverty, those who were tossed out of their houses when the housing bubble burst, those millions who become bankrupt just because they become sick, those living in the slums of Detroit and other cities. How soon will they ‘make it’? The truth is that it was a country of have-nots and haves right from the start and before that, just like all other capitalist societies. Trying to keep the myth of the American dream where every and anyone can make it to the presidency has long since failed to anyone with half a brain. (See “A Reality Check” in this issue.)

GOVERNMENT FLOUTS ITS OWN LAWS ON WORKERS' RIGHTS

Our friends at The Toronto Star constantly maintain the unenviable record of addressing the abuses of capitalism, but never advocating its abolition. On June 24th., an article called attention to the Province of Ontario's flouting of the workers' right to public holidays, rest periods, and permanent employment. The provincial government is paying millions of dollars to temporary employment agencies that its own inspectors have found to have broken the law, The Star learned. A report issued by the Ministry of Labour's 2012 inspections shows that more than one third of the temporary agencies used by the government were found to have violated the Employment Standards Act. This did not stop six government ministries including the Ministry of Labour itself from paying offending companies more than \$775,000 for temporary help. A further \$2.2 million in unspecified payments was paid to law-breaking agencies, that, according to their web sites, provide a range of different services including human resource units and permanent job placements.

A union official commented, "It's really troublesome to me. If it's truly a goal of theirs to make work in Ontario fairer, then the government needs to lead by example with its own employees. The official added that she also started as a temporary worker in 2009 and was paid \$14 an hour that was at least \$8 less than her permanent counterparts were paid. In addition, workers in her unit were often saddled with extra tasks because they could not afford to say no, "The pressure to take on absolutely anything that needed to be done was certainly much higher if you were a temp worker. We had work that involved incredibly private information. We had work that involved dealing with people in really sensitive situations and work that involved oversight – making sure the government's money was being spent appropriately. How could that work be done effectively by someone who knows they are not making a lot more than working in a fast food restaurant."

Hiring temporary workers, then, is a matter of good economics for the company's bottom line and having a greater measure of control over unionized workers. If it can be done in the Third World, why not find ways to do it here? It all makes good sense for capital.

Drake International, one of the temporary worker agencies in Ontario and considered a 'vender of record' for the public service, received more than \$620,000 in government payments. That's despite being penalized by the Ministry of Labour for shoddy record keeping, restricting temporary

workers from being hired directly by the government, and for not ensuring that workers received proper eating periods, public holidays, or limits on their hours of work. According to the province's public records for 2013-14, the Ministry of Labour itself paid almost \$71,000 in temporary worker wages to Drake, even after its own inspection exposed them as lawbreakers. The agency also had contracts with other ministries including Health and Welfare.

Other government-approved agencies were also found to be in violation of the act during the 2012 inspection. The following year, these agencies received more than \$600,000 in government payments for unspecified services. In total, the public accounts records show that Ontario ministries collectively spent more than \$18 million on temporary services in 2014. How much of that was spent on companies that imposed harsh conditions on their work force is anybody's guess, but in capitalism a company must keep pace with its rivals or go bust.

Nor are temporary workers any better off in the private sector where they can be kept on as temporary indefinitely in order to keep the wage bill lower. Since temporary workers can be let go anytime, they have no choice but to work as they are told and put up with forced overtime and fewer breaks. There is no difference, then, between the private sector and the government in the treatment of these workers. One is forced to maintain profit levels and the other wants to keep expenses down in a recession with lower tax revenues, even by the Ministry of Labour, the watchdog of fair practices.

To look for a way out within capitalism is useless. Even forming unions who fight a rearguard action against the worst excesses of capitalism in boom times, have little influence in times of recession. Only a socialist society where there will be no 'workers' and 'owners' who have antagonistic goals, and where the needs of all humans will be the major reason for producing and distributing goods, will work-related problems such as those experienced today by temporary workers be put to rest permanently.

We welcome correspondence from our readers. Send email to spc@iname.com or write us at Box 4280 Victoria, BC Canada V8X 3X8

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