

World Socialist Review

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journal of the world socialist movement in the united states

If you had your druthers, which world order would YOU choose?

This...

nameless were it not for the pair of crutches lying on the asphalt behind the 7-Eleven. In this society those who cannot afford to consume get consumed like any other product.

During winter, the forces of nature ease society's human-waste burden. Frozen corpses are regularly discovered in remote corners of Chicago's urban wasteland. Sometimes these deaths get a small mention in the Chicago Tribune. But there is competition for that space. A 17-year-old boy rapes a 14-year-old girl and then stabs her to death because he wants her warm-up jacket. A pregnant teenager delivers her baby into the toilet and watches it drown as she cleans up her afterbirth. Five-year-old twins burn to death after lighting matches in the dark closet where their grandmother regularly locked them when she left her apartment. What would once have been apocalyptic visions are now the everyday reality of a nation in decay.

Will things get better? George Bush's promised thousand points of light are not shining bright. That rhetoric served to mask the ~~gold, hard reality that grows ever more apparent. The past 15 years have been one long field day for the rich and no one else scrambling to reinstate~~ States and Federal

The return of TB creates a time warp. The emergence of multi-drug-resistant TB strains sets medicine back to 1950. The arrival of AIDS, a disease for which there are no curative drugs, harkens back to the pre-antibiotic era before World War II. And the existence again of vast numbers of poor and sickly people living in congested housing and cavernous shelters or jammed into prisons recasts the TB-fostering conditions that prevailed at the turn of the century.

Despite the threat posed by combined AIDS-TB infection of TB smoldering in drug addicts, they

Or this...

- **No wages**

No more working for a living

- **No buying or selling**

You need it, you ask for it

- **Free access to all goods and services**

You ask for it, you get it

- **Work as one of life's pleasures**

Work for free and have it all

Vote for yourself • Unscientific socialism • Debate with the Marxist-Leninist Party-USA • Why be a socialist? • Letter from Vermont • S&L scandal • Review of *Looking Forward* • Death on the job • Bush's Kampf

Vote for yourself for a change

(Your only good option is World Socialism)

Socialists advocate the use of the ballot by a class-conscious working class (a term we use all-inclusively) to replace capitalism with socialism. This is the only option with any revolutionary implications. You should vote for the elimination of production for profit and the ending of the class division of society, rather than for proposals to make these more viable; least of all should you vote simply for candidates (on any grounds). While it is true a ballot marked "World Socialism" will most likely be discarded, voting for those whose candidacies are in fact a denial of the need for making a real change seems like an even better way to waste your vote—don't you agree? Ø

A common anxiety among eligible voters in a democracy is, "Does my vote really count? Will it make a difference?" To avoid wasting your vote (again), it's only fair to ask yourself what you are voting for and what you really want out of life.

In the present political climate of these United States, it is an easy bet you will not find a single candidate on your ballot who will support (or can even conceive of) reorganizing society along lines other than buying and selling. Whether they be Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians or a candidate from some other party, all they can offer you is more suffering—more of the same day-to-day restricted access to the very things your survival depends on. Little wonder that a feeling of uselessness and futility grows for an increasing number of voters from one election to the next.

Something is obviously, horrendously wrong with the whole civic exercise. You don't have to look far to find out why, either. Just take a general look around at the choices in this flourishing democracy.

√ The *Democrats*, who generally hoodwink voters into voting for them on the argument that government can serve as a regulator of capitalism's harsh breakdowns and human neglect to provide a decent standard of living—even a higher standard of living under a robust economy guided by their benevolent government intervention. *Government increases capitalism's capacity to meet people's needs.*

√ The *Republicans*, who on the other hand con voters into voting for them by arguing that government pressures actually lead to the collapse of capital's expansion; that a secure, unsurpassed life-

style can best be expressed through a private sector less fettered by the government. *Freedom for free enterprise!*

√ *All other political parties*—leftist, rightist and points in between—who advocate more individual input into producing a more dynamic buying and selling culture. For all their progressivism, these "alternative" parties would still lock us into one variation or another of the buying and selling system: *Grassroots capital acquisition!*

Needless to say, all of the above prescriptions for a "just" system of buying and selling are exercises in futile utopianism. Wage-slaves will find no solution in shuffling their shackles. Choose between capitalism and capitalism and you are sure to get capitalism; your social status as a wage-slave will remain unchanged.

Many people vote for candidates they consider "electable," only to find they are perpetuating their own status as losers. We, the majority, need to instill another choice into the existing "democratic process": us winning and them losing!

The only effective game plan for a successful democracy is socialism, a system of society featuring unrestricted

access to all goods and services. In socialism people will be able to regulate the production and distribution of wealth directly and democratically (since goods and services will be neither bought and sold nor bartered) by simply "voting" for what they need, without having to work for the privilege. Under the present system, they are forced to "vote" in the marketplace with ballots weighted by how much money they can earn, with the lowest incomes having no clout at all.

By writing "WORLD SOCIALISM" across your next ballot, you will contribute your vote to an historically loudening chorus whose demands cannot ultimately be denied. The generations before you have until now chosen capitalism. As socialists we ask in good faith, "Is this the type of world you really want?"

Once more in 1992 the choice will be yours as the country's owning class re-opens the floodgates of electoral persuasion. Don't make the same mistake again by voting for or against their candidates—or abstaining in disgust. Vote for a society without wages, profits or class divisions; vote for yourself!

—WJ Lawrimore



The World Socialist Review

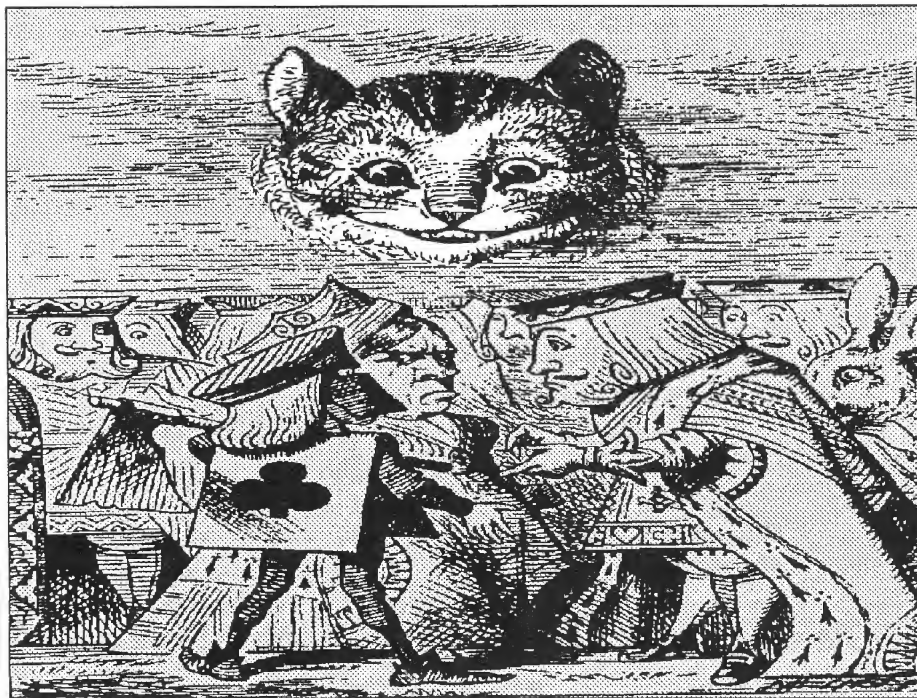
Journal of the world socialist movement in the united states

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Unscientific Socialism

A re-reading of a failed ideology

In the first part of this article, we examined the essentially bourgeois character of Lenin's views on class consciousness and the autocratic style of Bolshevik reformism (as he expounds them in *What is to be Done?* (1), a seminal work in the history of Russian reformism). Part II will look at the special role played by the latter in laying the foundations for an alternative format of capital accumulation and how this made the Bolshevik program not only useless to the working class but also a pernicious drain on its energy. The key element of Lenin's "organization of revolutionaries"—a critical one in the battle to gain control of surplus-value production in Russia—was its abhorrence of democracy, both within the party and through the party's monopoly of the government. (Since this article was written, the Leninist "U.S.S.R." has disappeared.)



Part II

Socialism and Democracy

A major blemish on Lenin's supposed Marxism is his conception of "economic" and "political" work. In *What is to be Done?* he conducts a wearisome and never-ending polemic against the "Economism" of two journals-in-exile, *Workers' Cause* (*Rabocheye Dyelo*) and *Workers' Thought* (*Rabochaya Mysl*): "The overwhelming majority of Russian Social-Democrats have of late been almost entirely absorbed by this work of organising the exposure of factory conditions....They have lost sight of the fact that this, *taken by itself*, is in essence still not Social-Democratic work, but merely trade-union work....Not only must Social-Democrats not confine themselves exclusively to the economic struggle, but...they

must not allow the organisation of economic exposures to become the predominant part of their activities. We must take up actively the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness" (pp 56-57, "Trade-Unionist Politics and Social-Democratic Politics").

Taken out of context, this is sensible enough; the charge against the "Economists" was that they were sidetracking the movement by not responding to new conditions (i.e., the increasing militance of the workers). The problem is, however, precisely the *context* in which Lenin made these remarks. If the term "revolution" conveys no more than a sum total of technical procedures, then he was certainly—compared to his

opponents—a revolutionary. But revolutions, to a much greater extent, serve a social purpose, and standing up Lenin's writings against those of Karl Marx, the tenor of his ideas is unmistakably reformist, not revolutionary.

This becomes more readily apparent when seen against the backdrop of Social Democracy's evolution in the last quarter of the 19th century.

The early socialists did not systematically distinguish between "economic work" and "political work." Back in 1875, when after six years the Eisenachers (the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany, whom Engels called "our Party" in connection with Marx's critique of the Gotha Program) (2) merged with the Lassalleans to form the Socialist Workers' Party, it had seemed like a good idea to include a package of political and economic reforms—the "minimum program" (not that it made Marx or Engels very happy). It would serve to interest workers (the new party believed) in the larger objective of totally eliminating capital and wage labor. This casual distinction of the 1870s, under the swelling influx of opportunistic new members in the 90s, became transformed into a systematically worked out division of party labor. The "crisis of Social Democracy" reached the surface when the founding members realized the dilemma they had created for themselves; but, in the end, German Social Democracy as a whole went over little by little to a policy of economic and political reform. The door which had seemed to be opening out on a socialist revolution became once again locked shut.

The economic struggle

Obviously, if this had happened to the most advanced party claiming to stand for socialism, the Russian variety did not stand a much better chance. In fact, it did a good deal worse, all things

considered. In his book Lenin jumps on A.S. Martynov for making a statement in a *Workers' Cause* article ("the Social-Democrats are now confronted with the task of lending the economic struggle itself, as far as possible, a political character," p 58). Through nearly forty pages Lenin hounds this quotation, proving that political exposure is more "revolutionary" than playing trade-unionist. His solution to the crisis of Social Democracy is to concentrate on broad-based political work, reaching out to other social classes (as discussed in Part I of this series).

The difficulty, however, is that the very distinction itself implies the supremacy of the economic work; for the predominantly political activities (considered as purely technical procedures) which Lenin envisions are but indirect routes to economic reforms. How else would one describe a successful bourgeois-democratic revolution (which at that time Lenin still supported), particularly one obligated to a policy of radical agrarian reform? It is easy to see what would happen to the material interests of the working class at that point: lacking the ability to directly abolish commodity exchange, the new régime would be forced to proceed with the capitalization of peasant agriculture, thus converting its beneficiaries into a new class of, well, capitalists. This is essentially the course that events did take after the November Revolution. In point of fact, ideology changes absolutely nothing (entirely apart from its being unscientific in the first place). Where capital is accumulated and wages are paid, there you still have capitalism, even when it is managed exclusively by the state, and no matter how it may be rationalized.

No socialist revolution

Wages are a social relation, and unless they are directly abolished as a result of the deliberate and considered support of the majority, political technique counts for nothing. Since tsarist Russia had only developed a very meagre (if

thriving) wages system at the turn of the century, it follows that such a revolution could not then have taken place. There was no economic basis for one. Lenin nowhere in any of his writings actually proposes abolishing the wages system—and with good reason.

Lenin's was at best a simplistic and incomplete grasp of the fact that a socialist party, as a political party, is one that makes use of the social, economic and political data generated in great profusion by capitalism itself, to show workers why they ought to get rid of it. In proposing to recapitalize Russian industry and agriculture, Lenin advanced little beyond the backward and boorish conceptions of the Russian bourgeoisie and



in the process demonstrated little sophistication at appreciating what makes a socialist movement run: native working-class intelligence. Yet his theoretical contribution to the spread of capitalism (the Worker-Peasant Alliance) was not a small one; indeed, one can only marvel at the energy and ingenuity with which he set about construing economic reform as political revolution. He spared not even the language of his own polemics.

Although he showed an extraordinary penchant for the unintelligent, repetitive use of terms coined by Karl Marx, what Lenin really discovered was a method for enabling the capitalist class, under the most adverse conditions, to metamorphose itself into a party pursuing economic reforms via political insurrection. Since such a course could only apply (realistically)

in mainly agricultural countries, naturally this breakthrough proved ultimately most successful in places like China, Vietnam, Cuba and Southern Africa.

We cannot really blame the workers and peasants of these countries—then largely agrarian—for losing their heads over it. Lenin's perversion of Marxism originated as basically just a functional device which allowed a narrow clique of elitists (future investors) in 1917 to sell a peasant majority on becoming farm-workers (later on, their employees). It lasted, everywhere it was tried, until the Leninists had finally transformed the conditions that had given rise to their own formula. In the end, as we see from the sequel, it reduces to the plain old reformist contention that capitalism *can* be made to benefit the working class.

In a book which you might imagine had a lot to do with the working class freeing itself from the grinding curse of surplus-value, Lenin scarcely even mentions it. In a work which purports to deal with the basics of organizing a socialist movement, so little direct connection does this have with the exploitation of wage labor, that neither surplus-value nor production for use figure in the book as fundamental concepts which the "organization of revolutionaries" is supposed to publicize! Lenin's lack of interest in democracy and his fascination with the technique of action belie a bourgeois-student preoccupation with theory and a corresponding lack of a sense of (working class) reality.

But perhaps Lenin's ignorance of what every worker knows is best brought into focus with his notion of the professional revolutionary.

(i) It may be that the English translator only fell asleep at the typewriter, but on one page Lenin seems to make the following peculiar statement: "The time has come," he says, "when Russian revolutionaries, guided by a genuinely revolutionary theory, relying upon the genuinely revolutionary and spontaneously

awakening class, can at last—at long last!—rise to full stature in all their giant strength” (p 105, “The Primitiveness of the Economists and the Organisation of the Revolutionaries”). The *revolutionaries!* How oddly this conflicts with Marx’s own “giant body of the proletariat”! And relying upon the genuinely revolutionary class (to help it accomplish its aims)? For sheer, undemocratic authoritarianism the sophistry of this passage is hard to beat. The “organization of revolutionaries” sounds like nothing so much as an ideal board of directors in a corporate enterprise, in all its giant strength....

(ii) There is something else that smells fishy about the giant stature of these Carnegies of socialism. “To be fully prepared for his task,” writes Lenin, “the worker-revolutionary must likewise become a professional revolutionary.” Hence, he judges, it is wrong to say that “since the worker spends eleven and a half hours in the factory, the brunt of all other revolutionary functions (apart from agitation) *‘must necessarily fall upon the shoulders of an extremely small force of intellectuals’*” (p 129). And, furthermore, “a worker-agitator who is at all gifted and ‘promising’ *must not be left to work eleven hours a day in a factory*” (p 130).

Revolutions, Incorporated

The cliché about where the money’s going to come from begins to take on a rather sinister dimension here. Obvi-

ously, aside from contributions from sympathetic liberals, businessmen and other well-heeled individuals, the bulk of income for the “organization of revolutionaries” is going to come out of the pockets of the workers, and probably also of peasants who can be talked into giving. Any intelligent worker might wonder a little at this proposal, for that income constitutes, in effect, a fund of surplus-value (deducted from necessary labor at that) and is to be spent—invested—as capital, very much like a modern-day pension fund; a fund, that is, set entirely apart from consumption needs and intended solely for (so to speak) “productive” use. The working class is supposed to set itself free from capital’s totalitarian rule by investing in a corporate enterprise—one which specializes in making revolutions! (3)

Lenin suffers from an abysmal confusion on the nature of working-class emancipation. The philosophical objective of putting the capitalist system to rest cannot be generated from within the conceptual innards of that system; the means of capital accumulation (which includes concepts and ideas) serve only the purpose of accumulating capital, whereas the abolition of the system requires a contrary use of the social and economic resources it provides. (This, after, all is the tenor of Marx’s metaphor of gravediggers.) Such a goal can only arise as a revulsion against the system, an adverse mental reaction growing organically out of each wage-earner’s experience. There is only a technical, economic continuity between a society of common ownership and one of private or state property: the “property question” raised in the *Communist Manifesto* involves on the contrary a thoroughgoing political rupture with the whole *stratum* of accumulators of capital. Making an industry out of socialist revolution is inherently conservative and betrays a slipshod indifference to basic questions raised by Marx and Engels. Means which spring from the *savoir faire* of the profitmakers will never be justified by the end of revolution; only those ideas which grow out of

the frustrations of alienated labor can be.

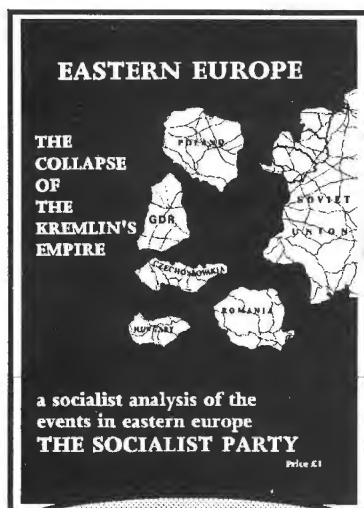
(iii) The domineering presence of this revolutionary Board of Directors has, in addition, some appalling implications for organized labor in the battle between labor and capital—

A small compact core of the most reliable, experienced and hardened workers, with responsible representatives in the principal districts and connected by all the rules of strict secrecy with the organisation of revolutionaries, can, with the widest support of the masses and *without any formal organisation*, perform all the functions of a trade-union organisation, in a manner, moreover, desirable to Social-Democracy [emphasis added]. Only in this way can we secure the consolidation and development of a Social-Democratic trade union movement, despite all the gendarmes (p 116). (4)

As if the skimpy, meagre body of the Russian working class were not already underdeveloped enough, it is desirable that the workers should not organize independently, so that the “political tasks” of Social Democracy might be the more easily carried out! It is not the business of a political party (much less a socialist one) to supply history with missing stages of social evolution; if “securing a Social-Democratic trade union movement” under the conditions then prevailing meant making decisions for the workers, then Lenin’s proposal didn’t begin to constitute a legitimate alternative for them. The drift of his analysis thus harbors an implicitly anti-union (and ultimately anti-working-class) outlook; he considered that trade unionism interfered with the Party’s politics if left to its own devices. (Nevertheless, a socialist party *should* take it on itself both to criticize the thinking and policies of the labor movement and to educate the workers—even despite themselves.)

Organizing against capital

Since the gendarme overshadows the capitalist, support for the Party network and its “political exposures” takes precedence over the workers’ organizing against the encroachments of capital. This has important consequences. Organizing against the *interests* of capital is historically a phase in which the working class comes, at length, not only to realize the need to reject private (in-



New Pamphlet!

cluding state) ownership of the means of production but also to school itself in the administrative process of running a complex, socialized organization. "Thinking negative" is a necessary first step in the evolution of a socialist, and trade unionism (potentially, at any rate) provides the historically and politically most viable basis for this.

Under Lenin's proposed dictatorship of the secretariat, this crucial world-historical step would be missing. Workers would lack any accumulated organizing experience of their own from which to draw on as revolutionaries; they would be left only with an initial impulse to overturn the system (or maybe nothing more than an unreasoning rejection of it that the system itself refuses to recognize), but no visceral conception of how to carry out its replacement *in their own interests*. Scattered individuals might well be attracted to socialism as an idea, but it is labor's education, under capitalism, in the mechanics of fighting back, that in the end provides Marx's ideas with their basic political muscle—and not the "organization of revolutionaries." (We need only look at the late unlamented Soviet Union, its erstwhile satellite régimes in Eastern Europe or the democracy movement in China to see the dismal results of the "art of politics" Lenin had in mind.)

(iv) Scientific socialism means, on the contrary, political science. And political science—like social science in general—requires implementation of the "broad democratic principle" that Lenin rejected as inexpedient. Take democracy out of the picture, and you will never get around to abolishing the exploitation of human beings by human beings. Thus, Lenin's "organization of revolutionaries" leads nowhere but to the same "government of men" whose obsolescence socialism is supposed to usher in, allowing free access to necessary goods and services to reduce it to the administration of wealth. Lenin provides no way out of the closed system of private (including, to repeat, state-owned) property based on the accumulation of capital.

This consideration applies to his movement as well. Instead of a clearly defined object and a statement of definite principles, you have a secret organization of

colleagues—virtually an exclusive club. In place of a party whose policy has a direct and demonstrable base in general, theoretical principles (such as are enunciated, for example, in the pages of *Capital*)—and which consequently "wages war against all other political parties" (5)—you have a narrow group of professional revolutionaries operating without benefit of the constraints imposed by criticism. Instead of a political party whose existence is the *expression* of working-class interests (i.e., emancipation from capital and wage slavery), you get one which somehow or other *imports* emancipation to the Dark Continent of the class struggle (from which the savage workers cannot escape "exclusively by their own efforts"). You get, in short, a group of intellectuals playing philosopher-king and not an organization of revolutionaries.

What is more, all of the characteristics which ought to typify the *principles* of the organization, Lenin invests instead in the *personalities* of the revolutionary colleagues. A socialist party's range of *ideas*—and its requirements for membership—are narrower and more selective (while its depth-analysis is stronger and better focused) than those of a trade-union movement, which merely opposes and does not seek to eliminate capital. It works from essential principles that differ fundamentally from the guiding principles of the workers' movement, because they are the final, reduced form of the class struggle (on which the latter rest) clarified into an immediate aim (introduction of common ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production and distribution). Its main function, in the formative period of the socialist majority, is diffusing socialist knowledge, so that the workers can form their own idea of the problem (and of its solution). Until the policy of immediate common ownership has won their support, the Party's identity as an organization of propaganda makes its educational activities the centerpiece of its efforts.

A forum for revolution

It is, in effect, merely the hub of a wheel; a forum for revolution in which the thoughts of the working class come to a focus—democratically and in public—according to the implicit laws of motion of

production for use. When the working class has become a class-conscious majority (not just a majority), it will find these socialists ready to take office as its delegates, for the purpose of transferring the ownership and control of the means of production to society as a whole—thus completing the abolition of the wages system. (Their mandate is, in the nature of the case, revocable on call.) Such a transfer, based on the conscious and deliberate desire of the majority, will not take decades to carry out, if the majority is in fact conscious of what it is doing, but only the length of time to pass the laws liberating production from the use of capital and consumption from the possession of money.

All of this makes openness and democracy organic features of the socialist party—exactly the opposite of the party Lenin envisages. Just as the capitalist only personifies his capital, the socialist (as a party member) only personifies a society of production for use. It is the *function* which is paramount. This status of instrument absolutely prohibits the adoption of reformist objectives, whether temporary and partial or permanent and radical—unless what workers "need" is a tool which can be used for anything but its own purpose. (This includes the policy of jockeying for position via the building of shrewdly calculated alliances—or alliances constructed on whatever rationale—with reformist groups.)

—Ron Elbert

(1) International Publishers, New York, 1978.

(2) In a letter to August Bebel, dated March 18-28, 1875 (Selected Works, p 336, International Publishers, New York, 1969).

(3) The reader may have noticed a lurking family resemblance between this and the various "third way" ideologies which we know collectively as Fascism.

(4) This does not prevent him from throwing out a sop to all those democratic wimps who dislike his "undemocratic" views: "We must have such circles, trade unions and organisations everywhere in as large a number as possible and with the widest variety of function...." (p 123; italics in the original).

(5) A phrase found in the Object and Declaration of Principles upheld by all the companion parties of socialism. In spite of the colorful (or, if you will, melodramatic) language, this means only that a socialist party must distance itself critically, organizationally and politically from all others; most especially from those that demonstrate a manifest tendency to promote misunderstanding of the term "socialism."

Letter from Vermont

The following letter was recently received in the mail. As he wrote in a subsequent letter, the writer was homeless at the time.

Rutland, Vermont

I am very much interested in your organization. I found your address in the Public Library here in town in the Encyclopedia of Associations. I am 25 years old and a working-class male (blue-collar worker). At the present time I am unemployed. I consider myself a socialist, and I'm fed up with the economy and society in general. There must be a political change in this country and the world if we are all to survive and live decently. I believe Socialism is the answer; not only for Amerika but the entire planet. Please send me some literature (newspapers and pamphlets) so I can learn more about your organization and become knowledgeable in the socialist philosophy of life. Thank you very much! I wish I could make a donation to cover the costs of shipping, but I'm on a tight budget at this time—sorry. If you could, can you also please send me a copy of your German-language journal, *Internationales Freies Wort*, too. I'm half-German and speak, read and write. Thanks a lot.

Len Meighy

Reply

It's a real scramble, and not just for food, clothing and shelter, when society (or rather, the marketplace) just decides you're not there anymore. (As bad as things can be in Vermont, they're even worse in a large metropolitan area like Boston or New York, of course, where the system can find still more de-meaning things to do to people without homes.)

A home, under capitalism, is reduced (economically speaking) to a heap of commodities; which is appropriate for a system of production that reduces wealth—everything which people can find useful for their survival—to “an immense collection of commodities.” This is not to knock having a home—just to say that the home the market takes away is a commodity, something to be bought and sold; which anybody who hasn't had their brains washed by the market system would recognize is an obscenity.

What's been happening during the Reagan-Bush era has been a competitive squeeze on corporate profits, causing the rich and the powerful to start putting the squeeze on those whom they exploit, in an effort to get at least some of “their” money back. That this should have the effect of pushing people off the

edge of the planet is literally not their business. The whole notion of “getting the government off your back” was a pied-piper scheme designed to “redistribute” (commodity) wealth “upward” (read: rob the poor). Even the S&L and banking scandal could be hooked up to this “twelve-year plan” as an allied stratum.

In reality, though, even an honest government can do little—though governments are not ordinarily honest—to affect what the economy *in general* will make available in the way of basic necessities. Whether it's boom or whether it's bust, the politicians can only take some portion of the surplus value produced by workers, funneled via the employer class to the state, and (under the best of circumstances) merely divert more of it toward housing and food subsidies that blunt the sharp edges of the worst poverty. Usually, the worse (or the worst) options are the ones they choose.

Between capitalist government over an exploited and repressed majority and socialist administration of wealth lies a vast gulf of conception and design. A world of socialist communities will not *have* any governments. Capitalists, as a minority owning the means of produc-

ing wealth, can often (though not always) make a few extra miserable commodities available to a portion of their wage slaves; but socialism sets people free from anyone's ability to make them poor in the first place by giving them back the inherent access to the things they need to survive, whether as individuals or as members of the community. This is because the whole community owns (and democratically controls) the sources of wealth and the means of producing it.

One of the things that becomes obsolete in a socialist society is the obligation to sell yourself (work at a job) to get by. Direct access to the things you need eliminates the whole basis for employment; everyone works voluntarily for everybody else. In fact, what most often stops people from getting excited about how easy it would be to bring this about is only their lack of confidence in its feasibility. Few would argue with its *desirability*.

So if you're eager to join others who seek to put the socialist alternative into practice now, we're eager to have your help. What we concentrate on at present is the “educational” phase of persuading people; the more “active” phase of electing delegates to office (subject to immediate recall, if necessary) has to wait until enough people recognize the merits of socialism and are willing to act on them consciously and deliberately. Socialists can in the meantime occasionally run for office (as they do, for example, in Great Britain), but lack of a clear socialist majority reduces this to an effort at education rather than an actually revolutionary action. (Part of the problem is that a socialist revolution has to be worldwide: not necessarily all at once, but as part of the same movement to replace the whole buying and selling system with one of free access.)

If you find you agree with our Object and Declaration of Principles, you should consider applying for membership. Nothing is more urgent or important in our times than introducing common ownership of the means of wealth production and distribution. Ø

Debate with the Marxist-

The following exchange of views took place over the past year between the World Socialist Party (US) and the Marxist-Leninist Party-USA. Difficulties with putting out the present issue of the *World Socialist Review* prevented publication of this exchange any sooner than this. In the meantime, of course, the once seemingly monolithic Soviet Union voluntarily and explosively dissolved itself, thus dating some of the discussion below.

Although the MLP does advocate an "eventual classless communist society," they mean this in the Leninist sense; they seek to concentrate on what they call "building workers' socialism," which apparently can be achieved by promoting slogans such as "U.S. imperialism, out of the Persian Gulf!" and "Workers and oppressed, get organized in the class struggle!"

(MLP-USA) April 25, 1991

I have got the tape you sent me with your debate on Leninism vs. the revisionist CPGB. I think it is time to really get back to the classics of Marx, Engels AND LENIN. But we must approach this work as an attempt to correct past errors. Of course this cannot be done in absence of concrete practice. This means consistent paced work in the class struggles. These take many forms now—building up effective movements against cut backs, layoffs, overwork and also the struggles against the rising tide of racism and sexism, etc.

We must wage struggle on many fronts and expose the capitalist source of all this misery and oppression which afflicts the working people. The opportunists and class collaborators must also be fought inside the movements as well.

I am a supporter of the MARXIST-LENINIST PARTY-USA. I enclose our newspaper, *The Workers' Advocate*. Please study it and let me know your views, pro & con.

N.C.

Los Angeles Supporters
Marxist Leninist Party-USA

WSP (July 18, 1991)

We thought it would be a good idea to respond to a couple of articles in the April 1, 1991 *Workers' Advocate* you sent, as well as to the points you raised in your letter.

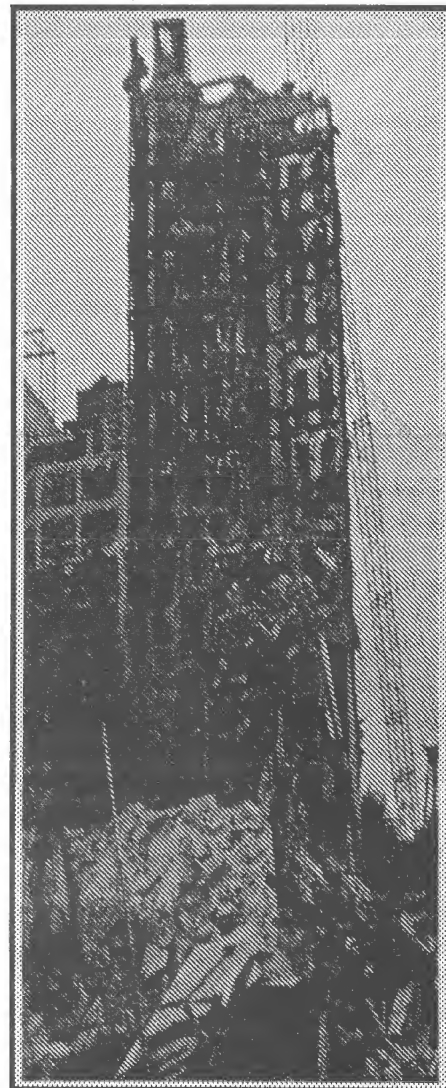
1. That both the U.S. and Russia have "overgorged state machines" and differ only in their specific modalities of oppressing the working class ("Communism and the Budget Crisis") is quite right. We cannot accept, unfortunately, that communism comes in "stages" permitting the working class to control the state machinery and use it to introduce reforms.

Marx, in *The Civil War in France* (Kerr Edition, 1934), spoke of the Paris Commune serving "as a lever for uprooting the economic foundations upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule." "With labor

emancipated," he says, "every man becomes a working man, and productive labor ceases to be a class attribute" (Section III, p 88). The phrase, "working man," as Marx used it here, did not mean "employee," someone who continues to work for wages or other forms of remuneration. The machinery of state, under capitalism, is an instrument for guiding and coordinating the accumulation of capital; for the workers to supervise their own exploitation is only a complicated way of saying that their exploiters have become invisible and unknown to them (which doesn't actually happen in practice anyhow).

"...The working class—he points out earlier, at the beginning of the same section—cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery and wield it for its own purposes." What Marx meant by this remark is that "laying hold of the state" (electing working-class governments to office) involves the acceptance by the working class of its own exploitation.

The author of the *Workers' Advocate* article refers, near the end, to a series of reforms which actually describe capitalism in an idealized version—full employment ("n unemployment"), reduc-



ing welfare "to a minimum," funding jobs, decent education, child care, health care, increased productivity (balanced against the cost of these reforms). No one seems to have learned that the better the individual institutions and mechanisms of capitalism function, the further away we are from taking the political step of replacing it as a system. The reforms cited were all an argument for the capitalist system, but rationalized as the "socialist revolution."

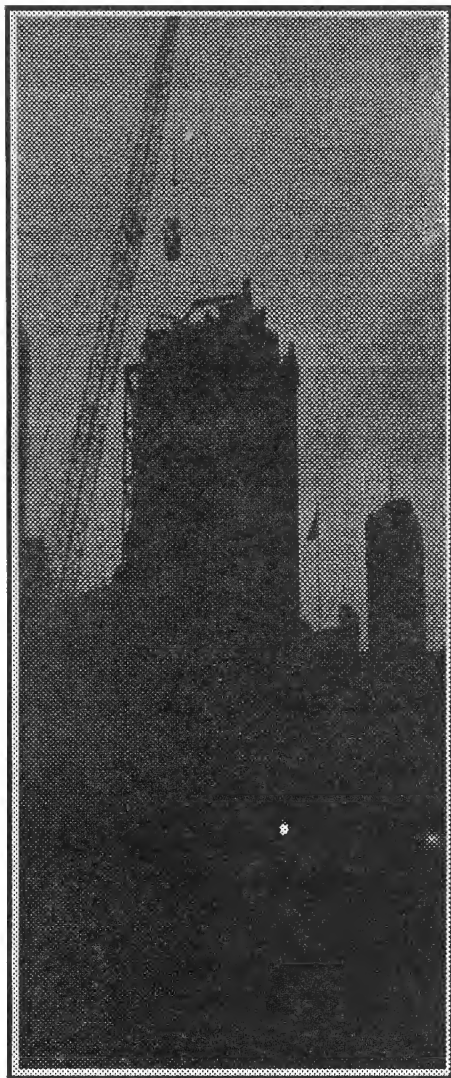
The same Marx who wrote "The Civil War in France" (1871) also penned a critique of the Gotha Program just a few short years later, and without announcing any shift in his views on the subject of emancipation. In that critique he referred to communist society *starting out* by razing the foundations of class

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rule—economic exploitation, the division of society into classes. Marx took the view, in other words, that the immediate outcome of a “socialist revolution” would necessarily have to be the removal of capital from the sphere of production. The “economical reforms” mentioned in “Communism and the Budget Crisis” are all anchored very tightly to a dependence on capital, even though workers, on the face of it, get a much better deal than when someone called “The Boss” tyrannized over them. (Would there in fact be a lack of bosses to go with these “economical reforms”?)

2. If people (workers) can be fooled into adopting a false consciousness, explaining away their misery in terms of the system which perpetuates it, there doesn't seem to be any particularly good reason to get behind all the many indi-

vidual struggles made by workers to fight the repression (policies of racism included) deployed by capital against them. If workers have a short-term conception of what is in their interests, rather than a revolutionary sense of what is at stake in the class struggle, it only confuses the issue not to point that out. All of these short-term conflicts end when those struggling (on both sides of the class divide) achieve their goals—but of course neither side can do so, at least not permanently. Workers can organize under various rubrics and, for a while, get a bigger slice of the profit pie (assuming it is expanding). Struggles waged against capital seldom have such happy endings in periods of crisis or decline.

The “consistent paced work” you refer to in your letter (“building up effective opposition movements against cut backs, layoffs, overwork and...struggles against the rising tide of racism and sexism”) is only the negative side of workers' struggles to make capitalism work for them—by removing immediate social and economic irritants, the hateful injustices and repression, from the larger framework of robbery at the point of production. Success in any of these struggles acts as a soporific to moving beyond them and grappling with the underlying issue of class ownership of the means of production. The ownership issue can only be dealt with separately, because it concerns capitalism as a whole. The only way to make a socialist revolution happen, in effect, is to execute the mandate of a class-conscious working class. A working class which remains immersed in its concrete struggles against capital does not have the understanding necessary to “issue” this mandate, and so it cannot draw any

MLP-USA Reply (August 5, 1991)

The following is a critique of your 7/18/91 reply to me. We think these polemics should be done out in the open so as to help our class in a small way in its struggle for political/economic understanding.

Let us start with the “practical” and by this I mean the struggles of workers

revolutionary lessons from those struggles or act as a generating source of political action.

3. Getting back to the classics of Marx and Engels is a good beginning, but the founders of scientific socialism made their share of misjudgements and overly optimistic assessments. We do not consider Lenin, as I'm sure you must have picked up from the tape we sent you, an exemplar of communist thinking. The body of theory and the insights Marx and Engels gave us should be measured against the still-pressing need to educate the working class to its revolutionary potential, however conditions under late capitalism may have changed. Until that process of education has achieved the effect of a revolutionary socialist consciousness, pursuing secondary goals of “practice” can only turn into a frustrating morass and must end by short-circuiting efforts to cross the divide of eliminating capital from production (and the market system from society).

Socialist revolution is a starting point from which it would remain to be seen what kind of a worldwide community of stateless peoples results. All the “practice” that is really needed, in the meantime, is forthcoming from us, the working class, once we begin attempting to run society in our own behalf (we already run it for our masters); and a major phase of that awakening is the use of democracy as a political and economic learning tool. But to start using that tool, workers need to sharpen their anti-market consciousness as a logical first step. Proposing reforms, on the contrary, reinforces a pro-market psychology. We can't afford to be “practical” when it comes to emancipating ourselves.

against the growing capitalist state attacks, both objectively and subjectively. Your group seems to scorn the day to day struggles of the workers against the capitalist offensive. You rather cavalierly, I think, dismiss these as mere struggles for “reforms” or as “a soporific,” etc. tying workers somehow further to capitalist loyalties. But the actual workers history exposes your views

to be both metaphysical and utopian as the class struggles are BOTH an *objective* and subjective social phenomenon. To abstain from participation in these "guerrilla skirmishes" (Marx) for improvements in living conditions would be to allow the bourgeoisie and their henchmen to reduce the working class to defeated and cowed wretches.

It is precisely out of the workers experiences (practice) in the fights on issues like cutbacks, speed-ups, layoffs, racist and sexist attacks, etc. the Marxist revolutionary politics and tactics become of such great value in building a wider mass movement that can "change the world." The building up of motion in the class through pickets, strikes, mass meetings, forums, and demonstrations materially aids the people to recognize their potential power as a social class opposed to the capitalists and their hangers-on. Historically these struggles

if sustained can give impetus to the constructing a mass revolutionary social *movement* that if organized on revolutionary lines can become the *material forces* that can pound down the fortress of capitalist social relations and its state machine.

Another thing that runs through your reply like a red thread (no pun intended) is that you put a veritable chinese wall between theory and practice, sneering at the "practical" (this does NOT mean pragmatic) side of the objective motion in society. Concretely, there is kind of a dialectical relationship at work here, whether the struggles are in ebb or flow. The class political forces fight things out in the course of the *actually existing* struggles that exist and are developing out of capitalism's own law governed contradictions. The gaping contradiction in your "revolutionary" view is your fetish with making parliamentary activity the acme of forging a force for socialism. In fact, it is this fetish, especially in the highly developed countries, with parliamentarian/Congressional forms of political activity, that the bourgeoisie mires the workers in a capitalist ideological fog. It amazes us that you cannot

see the contradiction in your sneering attitude towards the workers struggles for immediate demands which you see as inherently conservative (or liberal) and your euphoria over the alleged revolutionary liberating nature of dropping little pieces of paper into a capitalist state ballot box.

Finally, comrades, do not try to fit round pegs into square holes. Generally, it is not the best way to instill a materialist world outlook... Specifically, I refer to the way that you turn the famous quote from comrade Marx in his *Civil War in France* on its head. When he stated out of the experience of the Paris Commune that "The working class cannot simply lay hold of ready-made State machinery and wield it for its own purposes," he meant in keeping with the attempts of the commune, that the capitalist state had to be broken up and defeated and the workers would have to construct new revolutionary state forms to rule. The commune was NOT elected through parliament!

N.C.

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recommended reading

- Socialist Principles
- Questions of the Day
- From Capitalism to Socialism: How We Live and How We Could Live
- A World of Abundance
- Women and Socialism
- Socialism and Trade Unions
- The Strike Weapon
- Historical Materialism
- Socialist Party and War
- Is a Third World War Inevitable?
- Ireland: Past, Present and Future
- Ecology and Socialism
- Racism
- How We Live and How We Might Live (William Morris reprint)
- Eastern Europe

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WSP Reply

Concerning "participation in these 'guerrilla skirmishes'"—

Socialists don't, first of all, deny the utility or the benefit of gains made by the workers. The latter may come by these gains in direct struggle with their employers, or they may get them through reforms. However, what is good for us as wage-slaves (employment, for instance) is bad for us as human beings, since *both* short-term success and failure tend to make workers defer consideration of the really urgent issue—common ownership and democratic control of the means of production. The process of achieving or striving for short-term gains forms a separate track from the consciousness that seeks to eliminate capital altogether; it is out of keeping with the idea of socialist revolution to present the achievement of limited gains as leading toward replacing production for profit. It cannot produce any socialist (revolu-

tionary) consciousness.

"Participating" implies, secondly, an organizational separateness from the mass of working-class opinion which is not really the case. The short-term objectives of an organization are what distinguish it from all others; "participating" in extraneously defined struggles means casting aside organizational purpose and compromising the organization's integrity. Retaining an overarching rationale while promoting "immediate demands" voiced by workers is not sufficient to avoid such an outcome. More seriously, letting working-class consciousness in its "conservative" form (see below) set the agenda ignores its implicit revolutionary content. The only immediate demand a socialist majority can make is to end the system of wage exploitation.

Third, part of capitalism's formidable advantage over its predecessors is its structural dynamism. Capitalists as

individuals may not like what happens to their profits when workers manage to improve their living or working conditions—but as a class, the accumulators of capital can always accommodate these changes. They will seek, whenever they can, wherever they can, to reverse them. These improvements don't bring about any change the system couldn't have accommodated—otherwise the capitalist class always has the economic and political means to block it (the workers gave it to them).

Only one kind of change *can* make a difference: a deliberate and conscious rejection of the whole system by the majority of workers. Socialists do not “insert” this notion into our fellow workers' heads. It is a political change, a head change, and one that the latter must realize the need for as a result of having thought it out for themselves. We can only hasten the process through education: at the theoretical level, as propaganda, or at the practical level, conducting electoral campaigns that underscore the futility of expecting to remake capitalism so it will operate in the interests of society. What is at stake is establishing the need to base elimination of production for profit on its replacement by a radically different system, production for use.

The point of using the ballot, in any case, is *not* to run capitalism but only to use office as an opportunity for free propaganda; as socialists we do not accept the validity of advising the working class to strive for “realistic” short-term gains. Our aim is rather to act as a vehicle of working-class demand for the abolition of the wages system forthwith (possible because, by the time that happens, workers will have gotten a much more clearly focused idea

of how things should be reorganized).

“Participation in guerrilla skirmishes” sends a very mixed message to a majority that is supposed to be revolutionary: simultaneously it tells us we should “ultimately” consider eliminating wage exploitation—even as we are encouraged to strengthen our chains (improved exploitation does “work better,” after all). “Ruling,” on no matter what justification, always involves sustaining and managing the system of exploitation—even where one hypothesizes a state in which the exploited somehow rule over their exploiters.

Granting the distinction between “practical” and “pragmatic,” we don't put down the importance of practical forms of consciousness. Many workers mistakenly believe they can gain control of their destiny by putting someone in power who will “speak for” them. What workers need to do is stop listening to such advice—even for short-term reasons. By the same token, fighting the “actually existing struggles” developing out of capitalism's internal contradictions is the business of those forces that stand conservatively identified with the system.

What is practical is to propagandize and teach the basics of socialism: practice is the implementation of a theory, and socialist theory is the body of knowledge workers can acquire in becoming aware of the full impact of their own degradation. “Capitalist ideological fog” is what happens when workers proceed from one set of objectives to another without immediately rejecting this degradation because they give themselves nothing but ruling assumptions to choose from. It doesn't require dependence on a source of information that identifies itself as “capitalist.”

Last, Marx did not in fact advocate constructing a “revolutionary state.” This was a modification visited on him by Lenin. How does one “break up” something like a state in the first place? All we have here is a metaphor for expelling the incumbents from the government and changing the rules to prevent them from participating in the reorganized state.

However, this only amounts to eliminating one particular ruling group without directly eliminating capital itself, which continues functionally to generate the urgent need to manage the cycle of surplus-value production and circulation. This cycle can only be broken by blocking it deliberately and politically. Unless you take over the state explicitly to abolish the capital function and its antagonistic correlative, wages—and solely to accomplish that—you are stuck with having to manage the cycle of capital accumulation: even if you expeditiously chop off the head of every legally titled capitalist. You then become the new boss (same as the old boss). Lenin either missed this implication or was not being on the level.

This specifically excludes a revolutionary party from forming a government, except where the socialist majority has the express intention of putting an immediate end to the basis of class rule as such: eliminating the use of capital in production and the reliance on wages to parcel out the right to consume (functions which in and of themselves are oppressive). One can think of no rationale whereby Marx

— (Concluded on next page) —

A Note to Our Subscribers

We sincerely apologize for the infrequency and irregularity of issues up until now. Starting with the next issue (#9), the *World Socialist Review* will be printed in a four-page format. This should eliminate the logistical bottlenecks we've been experiencing, allowing it to appear on a regular—bi-monthly—basis (and eventually, to come out once a month).

The Editorial Committee

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Why be a socialist? (Why NOT?)

We live in an age of tremendous potential. Industry has made possible a world of abundance for all, the result of centuries of striving after better and more efficient means of producing what people need to live. Technology waits, in most cases, to be released so that we may all benefit from the advances made. Yet we are wasting time, for the most part, grubbing after the necessities of life. Why is this?

Of course, enough so-called experts will tell us that we ought not to aspire to a better life—beyond the limitations imposed by wage/salary slavery—because we are too stupid and/or too vicious to take our destiny into our own hands. These “experts” have either been talked into believing what they preach or have prostituted their intellectual integrity in exchange for a fatter paycheck. For the truth remains that we, the majority of humankind, have in fact little or no say over the uses to which the resources of our planet are put—little or no say over our own future and continued survival on the earth.

We live in a society where ownership and control of the means of producing and distributing wealth are concentrated in the hands of a small minority of the population. Goods are produced and services run not principally with a view to their utility, but to the realization of monetary profit—the accumulation of capital. Capitalist control of the means of life is ensured by paying wages to the rest of us. The paycheck is our ration card, entitling us to a little of what our masters exclusively possess on condition that we work to increase their profit.

The experts tell us...

As “experts” once justified the relations of feudal society as “God-given” and eternal, so today’s “experts” justify capitalism as an eternal state of affairs, holding good for all time. Why a small section of humankind should exclusively own, control and dispose of the means of life—what we produce—holding the rest of us to ransom over it, is a question we are encouraged not to ask. History, however, shows us that existing social relations are far from reflecting “eternal truths”; that society is dynamic; and that the society of today is just as much a result of socio-historical evolution as were previous social systems. As humans evolve, realizing better ways ex-

— Continued from previous page —
would have sought to justify the formation of a “revolutionary state” by the workers of Paris in 1871 in the sense of abolishing the wages system—particularly when he advised the working class later on to do exactly that and to stop aiming merely for “a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work” (a demand he characterized as a “conservative motto”). Ø

ist to do things, they implement them. If they do not adapt, failure and degeneration eventually ensue.

Socialists do not wish to return to a mythical utopian paradise. We recognize that a society of common ownership (not, as in Lenin’s mistaken view, equating socialism with nationalization, but *common* ownership of the means of life) demands cooperation and can only be built upon the industrial/technological base that capitalism has constructed. Only now is common, social, ownership of the means of life possible, where the means of production are *capable*, at last, of satisfying all with regard to the necessities of life, and much more besides.

Threat to our survival

Those who might think, “This is a nice idea, but...” should reflect upon the serious threat to our survival now posed by maintaining, through ignorance of cause and effect, a social system that has had its day but has become a dangerous anachronism. Indeed, degeneration is *already* a reality, and final destruction *will* ensue, from the continued maintenance of the capitalist system. Many groups and individuals are genuinely disturbed by the effects they see around them, but until they have the courage to face the cause they will be unable to resolve the problems posed by the system.

In a world of potential abundance, millions starve while the anarchy in production that capitalism entails results in massive waste, inflicting untold and unnecessary damage on the earth’s ecosystem. Food, like everything else, is produced for sale and profit. If profits cannot be realized, food is not distributed, while overproduction coupled with profits that cannot be made results in mountains of waste and destruction.

Forced by the system to compete with their rivals in the marketplace, the owners of the means of production have to cut costs and maximize profit. Pollution becomes ever more serious, while certain reformists preach abstinence to the workers. Technology presents us ever anew with the prospect of a war of total annihilation, shaped and developed by the interests of the capitalist class (who have to protect their sources of profit from the encroachments of their rivals)—even as they profit from continuous local wars claiming the lives of millions around the globe. Experts justify the arrangements that produce these evils instead of seeing them for what they are: the inevitable effects of maintaining a lethally defunct economic system.

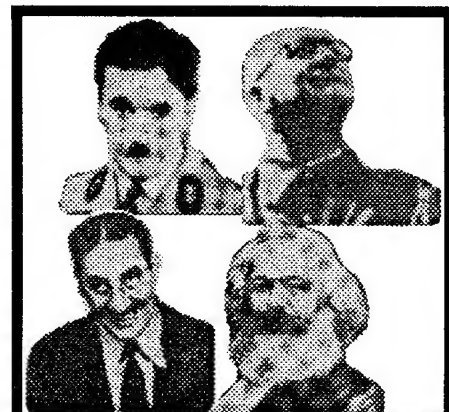
That the question, “Why be a socialist?” should still need to be asked at the close of the 20th century is a troubling reflection. The question should be, “Why on earth not?”

Armed with the realization that we must take our destiny as human beings into our own hands (and possessing the energy to carry it out), we must examine the cause, put two and two together, and eliminate capitalism before it eliminates us. It may seem a long road, but what makes one a socialist, finally, is the discovery that one’s experiences of the society in which one lives—which affects and colors all that makes up life, personal and emotional as well as political and analytical—are shared; that what one thought throughout one’s formative years was unique to oneself is in fact a common experience.

A coming to socialism—recognizing the essential task that history demands of us, the working class, today—is something we owe to ourselves and our children. Socialism will be the emergence of humankind from the cocoon of its painful childhood and adolescence, into a world where human potential, industry and technology will have a greater role to play—new and hitherto unimagined. If this appears a dream, then reality is born of dreams. When we have the courage to face it, to consign the capitalist and his entourage of glib-talking “experts” to the dust heap of history, we will have been true to the generations preceding us, who, by looking ahead rather than back, set us the example we should follow.

Especially as our future now demands it, and since standing still can only mean a wasteful, destructive end for us all, why not be a socialist?

—Anthony Karl Walker (SPGB)

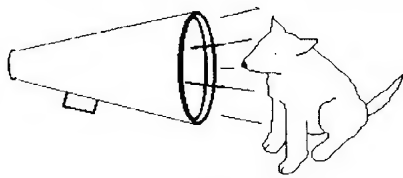


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YOU SAID IT

Our Masters' Voice

THE MARXISTS ARE NO MARX

The February 1991 *Scientific American* quoted Duncan K. Foley, an economist at Barnard College (Columbia University) as saying, "Ninety-nine percent of what Marx wrote was [about] capitalism. Only a tiny part was proposals for a socialist alternative." While this is true enough, it is a fact taken just a wee bit out of context. One might very scientifically conclude from this that what Marx "really meant" (as G.D.H. Cole put it) was, hey, just rattling a few cages here. What—me, get rid of capitalism?

Yet that is pretty much what Paul Wallich and Elizabeth Corcoran suggest (very politely) in their article, "The Analytical Economist: Don't write off Marx":

Marxism, says Stephen A. Marglin of Harvard University, has an advantage over mainstream economics: "it just tries to explain how capitalism works.

The implications (not to mention the purpose) of "just trying to explain how capitalism works" are delicately avoided. What do you do with this better explanation? Find a more humane way to run the madhouse? About the only way to harmonize this Marx with the Marx who admonished workers to abolish the wages system would be to "revise" him so as to prove that the "other" Marx couldn't possibly have been serious about that abolition stuff.

But seriousness aside, it seems there actually are two New Marxes: one who shows investors with a conscience how to take their profits quietly to bed, and, flipping him over, one who shows outsider-investors how to strike a mother lode with negative thinking. Both Marxes are equally viable. Take, for instance, Marxist professor Samuel S. Bowles (University of Massachusetts at Amherst), who assures us that

If anything, the task of social control over investment decisions is more pressing than ever before.

Then again, just as psychologists get paid to take away our anxieties about a system out of control, "marxist economists" have, among other things, pioneered studies of "the methods by which firms extract effort from employees." Useful, eh? Last but not least, the New Marx can act (in either version) as a kind of philosophical valium for administering otherwise unacceptable doses of pessimism into the capitalist mindset:

The mainstream theories, [Foley] explains, are handicapped by the assumption that capitalist economies are inherently stable.

How factual an interpretation would you say this is—coming from a pair of authors who can write (further on) that the results of the changes in Eastern Europe "are not likely to be the visible prosperity of Reaganite America or Thatcherite Britain"? (*The visible prosperity?* When in the 80s did we have *that?*) Probably it is just wicked enchanters who have tightened the screws on everybody these past twelve years, casting so many people out of their homes and sucking all that lovely money up into the sky (after diverting a portion of it into the Savings & Loans business).

The New Marx might give a jaunty look to certain economists' résumés, but he won't provide much insight to the rest of us on how we can get rid of the economists.

IT'S ALL RIGHT, MA —I'M ONLY NORMAN

Junk mail can be not only entertaining but downright profitable. Received in the mail (addressed to the "World Socialist Party of U"): an offer to "let the artist who inspired an entire nation help you in just four weeks FREE." The artist? Norman Rockwell. The point? "Show your people you're a manager who really cares."

Now, before you say, "Huh..." consider this: Norm's paintings "portrayed everyday people in everyday situations to capture the very heart and soul of his beloved country." Since no one who wants the good opinion of their peers would dare laugh out loud at this (how *bogus!*), all of your employees must therefore swoon with motivation when you hang up not just one of these posters of Norm's paintings, but...one every week!

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Put the 20th Century's best loved artist to work in your company and get greater cooperation in solving problems like these: indifference, low morale, mistakes and errors, wasted time and materials, negative attitudes, carelessness, absenteeism, poor quality work.

The fact that the company exploits them, keeps them as close to the poverty line as it can get away with and that its owners may flaunt a few privileges will simply melt away! Fooling and manipulating your fellow human beings was never so easy (and if you sign up for the program, the folks at Clement Communications will get to make a few bucks too!)

It's really difficult to decide which predominates here: pathetic self-deception or power-tipping cynicism. But it should make anyone

who has to live by selling their working abilities wonder if putting up with this sort of shabby insult all the days of their working life is worth the mere survival.

NOBODY HERE BUT US!

The next time you get to spend \$100,000 on four years of education at an institution of higher learning, let everyone know. Most people obviously can't. Most human beings—endowed with the same native intelligence as those who can afford it—find themselves just plain locked out. This news doesn't spark any rebellions from the impoverished masses and is so banal as to amount to kicking a dead horse. Everyone expects that in an order of privilege, the privileged will buy their way into the most exclusive places.

This doesn't necessarily mean that everyone Up There realizes very clearly what real life is like:

Presumably, spending four years—and close to \$100,000—at Harvard should translate into gaining a solid liberal arts education. The purpose of such an education is clear. It enables one to comprehend what it means to be an individual. It fosters an understanding of society. And it provides the tools needed for informed argument and analysis, which are particularly essential if a democracy is to function effectively [The Harvard Salient, November 1991].

"One" who can get hold of that much money (in the majority of cases) will have come to Harvard with an already highly structured understanding of society. As for what it means to be "an individual," you wouldn't have to go as far as Ethiopia or the Sudan to find out what malnutrition can do to your individuality—or as far as Iraq to find out what "turkey shooting" military pilots can do for the sub-human individuals they mass-murder. (It is the Big Money that provides the policy tools for arranging all of these things.)

The question is, can One understand a society in which One arguably has a stake in keeping wages low around the world (particularly in places like Mexico and Central America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the former U.S.S.R., the People's Republic of China, even the United States)? Or in which One might be expected to participate in governments that finance massacres of hundreds of thousands of individuals and sponsor democracy-squashing military dictatorships; or where global thermo-nuclear war survives "cold wars" because One makes lots of money from the "defense industry"? Or where One has investments that punch holes in the ozone layer?

In a society where Number One had better take care of Oneself before some other Number One does, those Number Ones who Haven't will have understandably different ideas of the world than those Number Ones who Have. One cannot achieve a healthy conception of a sick society if One's very existence requires that society be sick, and those of us who cannot afford to be in this category should not eat our hearts out over it. It isn't our system.

It's a mistake.

—Ron Elbert

Are you a socialist?

Socialism—a classless, wageless, moneyless society with free access to all goods and services—is necessary and possible. The only obstacle to it in our time is the lack of a class-conscious political majority. Are you a socialist? You might recognize some of your own ideas in the following statements.

1. Capitalism, even with reforms, cannot function in the interests of the working class. Capitalism, by its very nature, requires continual “reforms”; yet reforms cannot alter the basic relationship of wage-labor and capital and would not be considered, to begin with, if their legislation would lead to disturbing this relationship. Reforms, in other words, are designed to make capitalism more palatable to the working class by holding out the false hope of an improvement in their condition. To whatever extent they afford improvement, reforms benefit the capitalist class, not the working class.

2. To establish socialism the working class must first gain control of the powers of government through their political organization. It is by virtue of its control of state power that the capitalist class is able to perpetuate its system. State power gives control of the main avenues of education and propaganda—either directly or indirectly—and of the armed forces that frequently and efficiently crush ill-conceived working class attempts at violent opposition. The one way it is possible in a highly developed capitalism to oust the capitalist class from its ownership and control over the means of production and distribution is to first strip it of its control over the state.

Once this is accomplished the state will be converted from a government over people to an administration of community affairs (both locally and on a world scale). The World Socialist Party of the United States advocates the ballot, and no other method, as a means of abolishing capitalism.

3. Members of the World Socialist Party do not support—either directly or indirectly—members of any other political

party. It is always possible, even if difficult in some instances, to vote for world socialism by writing in the name of the Party and a member for a particular legislative office. Our main task, however, is to make socialists and not to advocate use of the ballot for anything short of socialism.

4. The World Socialist Party rejects the theory of leadership. Neither individual “great” personalities nor “revolutionary vanguards” can bring the world one day closer to socialism. The emancipation of the working class “must be the work of the working

Membership in the World Socialist Party of the United States requires an understanding of and agreement with what we consider to be the basics of scientific socialism. We have always been convinced that a worldwide system based upon production for use, rather than for sale on a market, requires that a majority of the population be socialist in attitude. Events since the establishment of the World Socialist Movement have, we maintain, proven the validity of this judgment. In our opinion, if you agree, generally, with these statements, you are a socialist and belong with us.

class itself.” Educators to explain socialism, yes! Administrators to carry out the will of the majority of the membership, yes! But leaders or “vanguards,” never!

5. There is an irreconcilable conflict between scientific socialism and religion. Socialists reject religion for two main reasons:

(a) Religion divides the universe into spiritual and physical realms, and all religions offer their adherents relief from their earthly problems through some form of appeal to the spiritual. Socialists see the cause of the problems that wrack human society as material and political. We see the solution as one involving material and political, not spiritual, means.

(b) Religions ally themselves with the institutions of class society. Particular religious organizations and leaders may, and frequently do, rebel against what they deem injustice, even suffering imprisonment and worse for their efforts. But they seek their solutions within the framework of the system socialists aim to abolish. One cannot understand the development of social evolution by resorting to religious ideas.

6. The system of society formerly in

effect in Russia, and still in effect in China and other so-called socialist or communist countries, is state capitalism. Goods and services, in those countries, as in avowedly capitalist lands, were always produced for sale on a market with a view to profit and not, primarily, for use. The placing of industry under the control of the state in no way alters the basic relationships of wage labor and capital. The working class remains a class of wage slaves. The class that controls the state remains a parasitical, surplus-value eating class.

7. Trade unionism is the means by which wage workers organize to “bargain collectively” in order that they might sell their labor power at the best possible price and to try to improve working conditions. The unorganized have no economic weapon with which to resist the attempts of capital to beat down their standards. But unions must work within the framework of capitalism. They are useful, then, to but a limited extent. They can do nothing toward lessening unemployment, for example.

In fact, they encourage employers to introduce more efficient methods in order to overcome added costs of higher wages and thereby hasten and increase unemployment. More and more the tendency of industry is toward a greater mass of production with fewer employees. Unions must, by their very nature, encourage such development although they are also known, occasionally, to resist this natural trend through what employers like to call “featherbedding.” As Marx put it: instead of the conservative motto, “a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work,” the workers ought to inscribe upon their banner “abolition of the wages system.” ◊

If you agree, generally, with the above sentiments, you belong with us. Can we hear from you?

Contact us either in writing at Box 405, Boston, MA 02272 or call us at (617) 628-9096.

All party events are open to the public

(IN ATLANTA: CONTACT WJ LAWRENCE, 1966 HOODLOFT TRAIL, ATHENIA, GA 30603)

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA and THE WORLD SOCIALIST PARTY OF THE UNITED STATES

OBJECT

The establishment of a system of society based on 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

The Companion Parties of Socialism hold 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 consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labor alone wealth is produced.
- 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.
- This antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
- 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.
- This emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
- 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 the agent of emancipation and overthrow of plutocratic privilege.

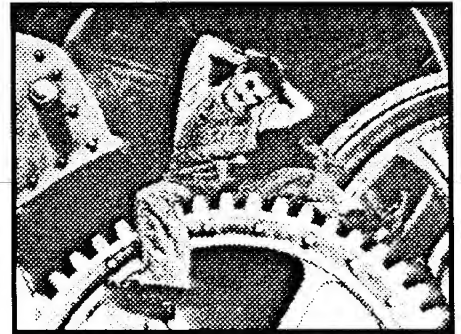
- As political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interest of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

The companion parties of Socialism, therefore, enter the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labor or avowedly capitalist, and call upon all members of the working class of these countries to support these principles to the end that a termination may be brought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labor, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

THE WORLD SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

The following companion parties also adhere to the same Object and Declaration of Principles:

WORLD SOCIALIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA, (a) PO Box 1440M, Melbourne, VIC 3001; (b) PO Box 8279, Stirling St., Perth, WA 6000 • **BUND DEMOKRATISCHER SOZIALISTEN**, Gussriegelstrasse 50, A-110 Vienna, AUSTRIA Journal: *Internationales Freies Wort* (\$1) • **SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA**, PO Box 4280 Station A, Victoria, BC V8X3X8 • **SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN**, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN Journal: *Socialist Standard* (75¢) • **WORLD SOCIALIST PARTY OF NEW ZEALAND**, PO Box 1929, Auckland, NI • **WORLD SOCIALIST PARTY (IRELAND)**, 41 Donegall Street, Belfast BT1 2FG • **VARLDS SOCIALISTISKA GRUPPEN**, c/o Dag Nilsson, Bergsbrunna villaväg 3BS-752 56 Uppsala, SWEDEN Journal: *Världssocialism*



LIFE UNDER CAPITALISM

50 Ways to Leave the System

HOW MANY GHOSTS CAN DANCE ON THE MEDAL OF HONOR?

David S. Rubitsky, 72, was denied the Medal of Honor—the U.S.'s highest combat decoration given to a wage-slave demerited enough to slaughter fellow human beings on behalf of our capitalist masters.

The reason Mr. Rubitsky did not receive this medal of dubious distinction was that a military review board did not believe his tale of killing 500 Japanese wage-slaves in a single day during world war II. He asserts the real reason he was denied the "honor" has to do with anti-semitic bigotry.

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith supports David Rubitsky in trying to convince the world that he did indeed perform the near-miracle of slaughtering 500 fellow human beings in one whoop. They termed the military's refusal of recognition "unconscionable."

Unconscionable? Seeking praise for someone who claims to have killed 500 people is what's really "unconscionable." Only in our capitalist society, with its sick morality of pursuing profit over human needs—and, where necessary, at the expense of human needs—would a massacre qualify one for the status of hero. The fact that what passes for a human rights organization throws its weight behind rationalizing such atrocious behavior just goes to show how warped this society is, how morbid is its mentality.

In socialist society no one will get decorated with medals for being the "most ferocious one alive." No markets to fight over, thus no wars. Only one world where we all have a common interest in each other's well-being. Pathetic scenes of old men taking pride in killing fellow human beings will be a thing of the past. It is a future that is long overdue.

—WJ Laurimore

Anatomy of a Debacle

Once upon a time, a handsome Prince of Intellectual Darkness on his way to become King of Washington promised his subjects that he would “get the government off their backs.” And his subjects believed that he was talking to all of them; when in fact he was talking right over their heads and only addressing folks with lots of money to invest—or those who could get hold of it if the potential for self-enrichment were sufficiently enormous.

The name of this Prince of Darkness was Ronald Reagan; and as an actor himself (with some help from his predecessor, King James), he really did get the government off the backs of the savings and loan “industry” by changing the industry into a regular pig with wings. His successor, King George, is in our days pimping for a sequel to the Reagan epic: liberation for commercial banks from those same archaic New Deal laws. And even though the two types of institution in olden times worked by very different rules, the reigns of Carter, Reagan and Bush span a single overarching crisis of profitability and money-lending that, in coming at last to a head, has virtually erased the distinction.

Supply-side economics (which came to be known as Reaganomics) arose as an attempt to resolve a long-term crisis of profitability brought on by U.S. capitalism’s concentration on the “defense industry” or “military-industrial complex.” Nominally, Reaganomics sought to heap “incentives” on the capitalist class by facilitating access to the well-springs of profit—tax breaks for businesses and the wealthy minority, among other items. In real terms, however, this program constituted a mandate to recoup on a lower average of profit (linked in the U.S. to a declining share in world markets) by revising living standards downward; thus it would free a portion of the “wages bill” for reabsorption by the

profit-makers (including the withholding tax, welfare, and housing and other subsidies).

The owners of the surplus value, skimmed off the labor of wage-slaves, calculated this would serve as an adequate stopgap. In liberating capital formation, Reaganomics never touched the Pentagon budget, nor did it find anything contradictory in that. This may help to explain how a tortuous sort of “fiscal conservatism” swept both the executive and legislative branches off their feet, causing a uniquely rose-colored blindness to afflict them both and laying the groundwork for what became “the largest government cover-up of a financial scandal ever in the country’s history” [*The Nation*, 11/19/90].*

Supply-side theory

The very savings and loan scandal itself represents an application of the same supply-side theory again being recommended for commercial banks:

Just as [Fernand] St. Germain, [Jake] Garn, [Richard] Pratt and [M. Danny] Wall argued that the best way to help zombie thrifts recover was to remove all regulations so that they could ‘grow out’ of their problems, now Bush, Fed chair Greenspan, Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady, Seidman and others demand that the government dismantle what Seidman calls the ‘archaic laws’ that for many years have controlled commercial banking. They, too, want to ‘grow out’ of their perilous condition. [*The Nation*, 11/19/90]

Savings and loans institutions, before King Ronald’s Miracle, were limited by law to local financing of single-family homes and “modest apartments”; they were also supposed to promote saving among the “laboring classes”—which is where they got the now-sardonic name of “thrifts”. Commercial banks do some of this, too, but they go after large, relatively short-term loans to underwrite commercial and governmental activity [*Harper’s Magazine*, September 1990].**

Savings and loans institutions were

relatively small and modest compared to banks. They were “home-town” institutions—mutual associations owned by their depositors, with a minimum of 400 stockholders, no one of whom could own more than 10 percent of the shares, with “control groups” limited to 25 percent and stockholders having to live within 125 miles of the home office. This was the case, that is, up until first the Carter and then the Reagan hacks at the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB) started handing down regulations that had the effect of delivering the S&Ls over to real estate developers, money brokers/launders and a bat-cloud of self-dealers.

First the Bank Board (under Jimmy Carter) reduced the cash reserves requirement (money the S&L could make readily available on public demand) from five to three percent and loosened the already somewhat liberal accounting rules; then it allowed anyone who could provide the capital to buy or start a savings and loan. This had the effect of removing restrictions on the uses to which a “thrift” could be put, triggering a wave of new S&L charter applications by money-sniffing opportunists. But the new entrepreneurs still found themselves confronted by an obstacle in their drive to make infinite amounts of money through attracting “brokered deposits” advertising lucrative interest rates: this obstacle was the legal requirement that S&Ls make money available for mortgage financing.

Free the bankers!

In 1982 Representative Fernand (“Freddy”) St. Germain (a Democrat) and Utah Senator Jake Garn (a Republican) led the way in liberating them from servicing specific geographic areas on a small scale and requiring down payments for loans. After the Garn-St. Germain Depository Institutions Act became law, “thrifts” could devote as much as 40 percent of their assets to nonresidential real estate loans and make consumer loans for as much as 30 percent of assets. Savings and loan owners could “all but abandon the

business of home mortgages their thrifts were designed to provide" [*Harper's Magazine*, September 1990].

All of this set in motion one of the most stupendous spectacles of corruption yet witnessed in modern history. With the government off their backs, savings and loan operators of the new type acquired dizzying portfolios and the lifestyles of kings. The S&L lobby was not caught napping during this period of entrepreneurial glory, either; according to "Reaganaut" Edwin Gray (who, as chairman of the FHLBB from 1983 to 1987, was treated to an ice-bath of reality),

The fact is...when it came to thrift matters in the Congress, the U.S. League and many of its affiliates were the de facto government. What the League wanted, it got. What it did not want from Congress, it had killed...Every single day that I served as chairman of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, the U.S. League was in control of the Congress as an institution. [*The Nation*, 11/19/90]

Meanwhile, the international banks, benefiting from deposits flowing in from the Arab oil capitalists making profits hand over fist with their newfound "oil weapon," had begun lending money in the 70s to developing countries on a truly vast scale—and at very high rates of interest.

...the S&Ls, with their shabby little billion-dollar Ponzi schemes,** couldn't touch the Ponzi scheme then (and now) in operation among the international bankers, who had made, by investment banker Felix Rohatyn's calculations, a trillion dollars' worth of shaky loans to gamblers like Nigeria, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina. Rohatyn's description of the situation in 1985 was the purest Ponzi: "A thousand billion dollars. It's a great deal of money. And we are on this kind of treadmill where we have to keep lending more and more money to these countries [with the loans on the banks' books as 'assets'] or to these borrowers in order to maintain a facsimile of solvency, in order to maintain the capital of the banking system." [*The Nation*, 11/19/90]

The chickens came home to roost after 1985, when the very competent and conservative international banks began "quietly" writing off billions and billions of dollars in loans on which the principal (not just the interest) would never be repaid.

Before the Decade of Miracles, the

largest number of S&Ls to fail in a single year was thirteen; "in the first three years of [the Reagan] Administration 435 thrifts were buried and the first full year of Gray's FHLBB watch saw the death of another forty-one" [*The Nation*, 11/19/90]. The number of S&Ls in 1980 was 4,500 and has now sunken below 3,000; it is eventually expected to level off at 1,500. They are being swallowed up by bank-like "super S&Ls" or "superbanks" or else are being merged (most of them oblivious to the "small money"). The same permissive crew of politicians and administrators who alternately egged on and were bought up by the S&L lobby has wisely reasoned that the funds of large depositors must be protected at all costs and has very consistently posed the debacle as a question of "passing on the costs" of underwriting and restructuring the financing of the federal deposit insurance system to "taxpayers."

Decline in living standard

This means concretely that workers will end up having more money withheld from their pay without a corresponding increase in their wage or salary rates—a decline in living standards for everyone but the well-to-do, and to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars spread out over two or three generations. They also stand to lose their savings in the short run if the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation can't make good on its mandate to insure deposits up to \$100,000.

Commercial banks have been gorging at the trough themselves, with the result that 600 to 700 commercial banks were predicted in 1990 to fail over a 42-month period [*Atlanta Constitution*, 9/13/90]. During the Wild 80s nine of the ten largest Texas banks failed and were bought up by or merged with out-of-state banks; in 1986 nearly 10 percent of the banks in the United States were in "serious trouble"; the percentage of banks losing money had grown to over 11 percent in 1990—among them the biggest banks in the country (Chase Manhat-

tan, Chemical Banking Corporation, Citicorp); 200 banks failed in 1989, and 200 more were expected to fail in 1990; and according to a former FHLBB deputy chief economist, R. Dan Brumbaugh, speaking on national television, six major banks were "very close to true insolvency," while 460 banks with assets of \$42 billion had had losses in each year since 1986 [*The Nation*, 11/19/90]. The "conservative" Reagan government had to nationalize the Continental Illinois Bank after it failed in 1984. (All this is quite apart from any question of the proposed deregulation, which would allow banks to get into any activities they pleased.)

.....

If you have been wondering, from a human standpoint, how all these terrible-sounding numbers fit in, what (humanly speaking) they could really mean, you might try sitting back, relaxing and asking what might become of the incredibly Byzantine thought-processes of all these people *if no one were required to spend any money to get the things they needed*. That is, if no money (capital) were required to produce and distribute wealth and no money (income) were required to obtain goods and services. Obviously, it doesn't take any thought to see how utterly non-essential the whole sleazy process of buying and selling is to human well-being and survival. As big as the numbers are, and as much energy as the money-sucking frauds (legal and otherwise) pour into their aristocratic games, no one in a world without money—a world where all labor was voluntary and all wealth was produced to satisfy the needs of the community—would find it remotely interesting to construct elaborate sky-castles like these. No one could find any glory in amassing huge quantities of things from whose use they systematically excluded others and for which they themselves had no real use.

L.J. Davis, the author of the *Harper's Magazine* article cited, encourages us at the very outset to look no further than the ends of our noses: "if criminals are

given easy access to large sums of money, they will steal, and under such tempting circumstances even honest men may be corrupted." This he considers a "basic truth" about human nature. In a way this is true; having to use money is a corrupting and demeaning influence on human nature: it is the symbol of our dehumanization and the vehicle by which we dehumanize each other. But Davis doesn't draw the very logical conclusion that we should abolish the need for money in the first place—he only thinks we should increase the weight of our chains still further and make it difficult for individuals to get unrestricted access to handling large sums of other people's money.

Instead of just getting "more and more incensed," as the *Atlanta Constitution* reports [7/31/90], you might try doing a little brainstorming and draw up a wish list of things you might be interested in doing, places you might be interested in visiting (or living) or pursuits you might like to take up...if only you didn't have to spend all your time "earning a living," letting someone else tell you how to spend your time. As long as capital rules the world, it is pretty clear that the likes of us mere human beings never will learn how to become and like what we are—that is, what we do. Whoever makes us do things we would not otherwise need to do turns us into persons we really shouldn't be.

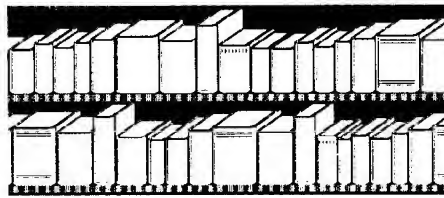
Just think...if everyone did this kind of brainstorming often enough, maybe even the horrendous news of living constantly on the brink of multiple exciting catastrophes—with socially deficient personalities in charge, foisting their ego-trips on the rest of us—would follow capital itself down the tubes, and we could all be free to be ourselves once again.

—AD

* "The Looting Decade" by Robert Sherrill.

** "Chronicle of a Debacle Foretold: How Deregulation Begat the S&L Scandal" by L.J. Davis.

*** Referring to a pyramid-type scam invented by a Boston con man named Charles Ponzi.



REVIEWED

Books of interest to socialists

NEITHER FORWARD NOR BACKWARD, BUT NOWHERE

Looking Forward: Economics for the Twenty First Century, Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel (1991). South End Press, 116 St. Botolph Street, Boston, MA 02115.

Looking Forward is an interesting—if not wholly original—attempt to imagine a capitalism stripped so bare of its recognizable evils it almost looks like the very abolition of the wages system itself. Unfortunately, it isn't so radical and doesn't really claim to be. It harks back both in spirit and title to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward—2000 to 1887*, even borrowing many of its overall concepts from it. (The same authors have also put out a companion volume, *The Political Economy of Participatory Economics*, a "rigorous treatment" of the same ideas, but laced with arcane equations intended solely to legitimize them among economists.) For all that, *Looking Forward* has some interest from a number of theoretical angles.

Capitalism without capitalists?

"We therefore want something like money," say the authors on page 70, "to facilitate participatory decision making and exchange—but we do not want to introduce the exploitative evils of capital. Likewise, we want something like prices to facilitate social planning by allowing comparisons of different goods, and also something like income to allow us to compare the overall social burden proposed by different consumption bundles. But we do not want to substitute reductionist

measures for social assessments of the human dimensions of work and consumption."

The search for concepts equivalent to those used in the capitalist marketplace, but from which the anti-social features have been filtered out, is a vain one. Anything which is "like money" is performing the functions of money, and the same goes for anything which is "like prices." Although the authors don't expressly state they want "something which is like capital," passing on money and prices in this fashion from a capitalist economy to one based on participation involves dragging along capital in train.

Things like transactions, costs and benefits, money and income do not come without strings attached. As long as something is performing the function of capital, the result must—can only be—capitalism. We might recall how the Leninists apologized profit right out of existence, arguing that "no one" in the Soviet Union made a profit, that all "profits" were mere accounting devices. The wages, however, were certainly real enough. Nor did the fact that the *nomenklatura* skimmed off the best of the take and lived in a world apart from the working class seem to becloud the Leninist's sense of conviction.

In *Looking Forward* the authors have projected a system which abolishes the overt functions of a market-based system, replacing these with equivalents that disavow their own traditional institutional patrimony: banks, insurance companies, brokerage houses, all become collapsed into "facilitation boards." All the basic outlines of marketplace functions remain in place, but in a reassembled form, with redirected interconnections and a transformed dynamic. The picture all this presents is, one must concede, vastly more humane than the theories of any of today's glib mouthpieces for capitalism—but one could pay a similar compliment to Adam Smith or David Ricardo. The reality is hidden impenetrably from view, because the data nec-

essary for interpreting the picture from the model are lacking.

Common ownership and self-managed workplaces

"Facilitation boards" replace companies and governments, act as planning agencies and "facilitate" rounds of negotiation or bargaining based on initial proposals by workers as consumers and citizens. The authors call this "iteration," from the repetition of successively modified proposals fed into the information network by all participants.

The iteration facilitation boards (IFBs) use knowledge of last year's plan, productive investments, changes in the labor force and estimates of necessary 'slack' to predict total output and translate this into average consumption and work loads. Each individual thus has an idea of what a fair consumption request and fair work proposal would be (p 82).

To give a genuinely anti-market production system its maximum flexibility, however, the system would have to be production- or labor-oriented, with an open-ended job structure that would allow for all contingencies in the gamut of working and living experiences. Trying to figure in a series of negotiated balances ("iterations") between work and consumption is a bit too close to the market system in a preoccupation with questions of supply and demand.

Beyond the technical aspects looms the unresolved question: who owns the means of production in a participatory economy as described in this book? Clearly, no private "actors" do (that is, individuals or corporate entities). But do the workers? Does the community? Everyone is theoretically a "worker." The authors make various oblique references on the fly to countries and "societies" in the same way as one would speak of "national capitals," yet they also use a more abolitionist rhetoric (there is no money or government *in the sense we know it*). There being no more national currency (as we know it) in a participatory economy, the concept of international trade will presumably give way

to iteration on a world scale, with any modifications necessary. But because "citizens" must propose a limit to their "income" (reinforced by "peer pressure"), they very definitely do not have the status of co-owners of the means of production.

Income (as we know it) acts as a limit on consumption and is based on the ownership of commodities; its introduction is a manifestation of commodity production. Even though everyone becomes reduced to the status of worker-citizen (or consumer), the commodity character of production is retained by virtue of the income limit (justified by invoking the "scarcity" of individual and collective resources), and therefore the class character of production is dispersed but not suppressed.

This limit testifies to the continued dependence of the worker on selling his or her working abilities—except that the market has been supplanted by a process of iteration. The ownership function reverts to "the community," but this community now functions as a control center for the economy; i.e., as an equivalent for the figure of the capitalist operating in the marketplace. The "participatory economy" thus comes as close as you can get to "capitalism without capitalists," even gaining in plausibility through its solemn burial of all traces of capital. The separation of the producers from the means of production does not, unfortunately, go away.

Do the antagonisms and collisions of capitalist society go away either? The room allowed for false starts and anomalous results in the iteration process leads one to suspect that turf battles between "actors" is a distinct possibility—always respecting, of course, the rhetoric of participation. The potential for the growth of some new form of encrusted proceduralism (as a replacement for the capitalist's obsession with the bottom line) that this seems to hint at could be the perfect basis for a rationale justifying a "capitalistic" indifference to the real

concerns of human beings. (Granted, this is a trap-door hypothesis—but it is there.)

Scarcity as a criterion

The question of who shall determine what and how much must be produced—when, where, how, by whom and why—the authors pose as a series of interrelated "investment" decisions in which all the different facilitation boards play a key role: "Which projects are worth doing and which are not? What order should they be done in? And how fast should we tackle the list, which is to say, how much present consumption are we willing to sacrifice for future benefit?" (p 121)

Like Bellamy, Albert and Hahnel attempt to make use of conventional economic concepts (money, capital, investment and so on) for subversive purposes but only end up demonstrating how useless (and certainly redundant) those concepts are for *human* purposes. This affects just how radical their participatory economic system can actually be. The statement quoted implies the concept of income. If we assume income limits for individual consumption, then of course we will have to assume them for wealth production as well. This is the logic of the marketplace.

A true anti-market production system (which uses no money in *any* sense of the term—and also does not depend on bargaining goods and services in a spirit of exchanging one value against another) does not assume these limits. The circulation of value is a jaded expression of the exploitation of labor by capital, and a really "post-capitalist" society will not feature it—or anything "like" it. For people to be able to "share" resources, they must do so as owners,—which they cannot do if they occupy the dual role of worker (employee) and consumer (a "citizen" having an "income"). The capitalist is a beneficiary of production for profit: an owner/controller of processes of production,

but not generally a participant in them. Workers who manage workplaces as income-limited consumers are not occupying the same role of beneficiary; they are rather moderating the impact of those processes by eliminating the role of the capitalist as beneficiary.

The only way to effectively eliminate the evils of capitalism is to eliminate the system of wage exploitation on which it hinges. Retaining limits on income means retaining a conceptual equivalent for wages. The object cannot be simply to do a better job at running a system of production for exchange than did workers employed by the capitalist beneficiaries of the wages system. Production can support all demands made on it based on need (and the definition of need is wide rather than narrow); equity is both a logical criterion which the critic is driven to embrace in accepting limits and a poor substitute for freedom of choice.

The "limits" imposed by ecologically sound planning are only limits in the capitalist sense—from a human perspective, they are part of the definition of needs. (Defining *means* limiting, so that defining needs requires no externally imposed limits. Resources are only "limited" in the market sense; those who—on the contrary—make wise use of them do not experience them as limited but as abundant. We could make similar remarks about how the authors have consumers estimate the "sacrifice" to which workers must go in fulfilling consumption requests.)

Work as satisfaction

In spite of their repeated quotations from William Morris, the authors don't seem to view work as quintessentially a pleasure. For example, after we have finished wading through all the calculations, meetings and readjustments of the iteration process, does the following description give the impression of a carefree (or at least mellow) lifestyle?

...for an individual to work nonaverage hours in a given period and not disrupt a

humane balance of job complexes, he or she could diminish or increase his or her hours worked at all tasks in the same proportion. Each individual could then receive from his or her workplace an indicator of average labor hours expended as an accurate indicator of work effort contributed. Over a sufficient period, whenever a person's indicator was high (low) compared to the social average, the individual would have contributed more (less) to the social product and would be entitled to ask for more (less) consumption now or at some later date. Accounting money income thus equates to real socially average labor hours (p 71).

This borrows in a somewhat retrograde fashion from the concept of labor vouchers—"from each according to ability, to each according to labor." (Bellamy had everyone give The Nation their "best effort" or face draconian consequences.) Seeing exploitation as a merely unfair and abusive organization or distribution of work causes the authors to build a philosophically complete system that only becomes more involved and complicated as they proceed. While the concept of balanced work complexes is a salutary idea that society may take up in the absence of the profit motive (or in opposition to it), pegging these complexes to an average number of hours worked per individual at each workplace and then relating them to a social average smacks of suggesting an

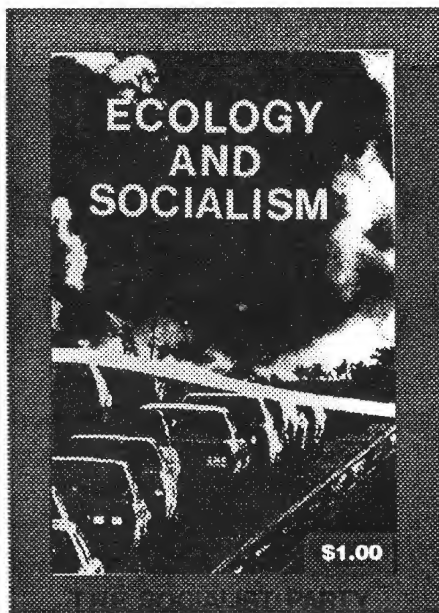
equivalent for *paying employees*.

If the cornerstone of participatory economics were each person's ability to do various kinds of work as a means of helping to satisfy everyone's needs, neither production nor consumption would be measured against each other. Pleasure, not equity, would be the guiding light of the system. A system of production for use will evolve in the direction of making work a pleasure once again (as Morris thought). From time to time throughout the book, work is referred to as a sacrifice of pleasure (from the standpoint of consumption), suggesting that promoting equity is not directly pleasurable and could even be a real pain.

Factoring out the ability to exploit labor-power

Albert and Hahnel may reduce prices to the status of indicators, but they don't reject the concept altogether (p 91). Prices form the units of information by which the different participants in the "social iterative process" of balancing supply and demand communicate with each other. Goods and services do not have a price in the sense of requiring a payment of some sort; prices are used to tell everyone what they can expect to get as they cycle and recycle their job and consumption proposals through successive stages of "iteration."

In other words, prices are OK (they function "equitably") if everyone has input into what "prices" are set; and how society goes about setting them affects their systemic characteristics. Traditional and "improved" (planned) varieties of capitalism (Albert and Hahnel's "coordinatorism") both require money prices, whereas a participatory economy eliminates the need for the concept of payment...well, almost. The whole problem with this approach, as stated above, is that price reflects value, and value is the property of commodities. Commodities are the building blocks of market systems. Everything will *not* be OK if



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only everyone can have input into configuring the price structure: the first ominous sign of potential trouble is that "there is pressure...on consumer councils to limit consumption to roughly average per capita value."

The benevolence of the actors toward their own system is not a sufficient condition for making it work. Force has to be applied—but this will only differentiate an anti-market from a market system if the force applied is already built into the structure of production itself, if it cannot be applied by one group or another. This force is in fact built into the market system, since the requirement of owning commodities compels individuals to enforce a distribution of wealth based on it and to behave accordingly; market systems turn a cold shoulder on and a deaf ear to any actions that take exception to this. Capitalism itself doesn't require the benevolence of capitalists toward each other. It certainly doesn't run on a fuel of equity.

A distribution of wealth based on free access to the means of life *compels* people to share the wealth because it renders individual ownership of the means of production (commodity ownership of productive goods and services) meaningless. Production for profit—the core of the market system—means just what it says: if the owner of the productive commodities cannot see a profit in producing wealth, no production will be undertaken. In a system of free access, maintained through an understanding of the stakes involved, the profit mo-

otive (and all that flows from it) lacks any point of departure. No one is able to impose inequitable conditions on anyone else because the power to deprive others of their means of subsistence has been factored out of the system altogether—by the design of its architects, the members of society acting together as part of a world community.

The qualitative change of replacing one system (capitalism) with another (socialism) requires a change of basis, not merely of rules; participatory economics, as outlined here, only seeks to reorganize an already capitalized production system, proposing to make it function "equitably" by radically revising the rules, even to the extent of making the accumulation of "scarce" productive resources optional. But it is precisely this presumption of "scarcity" that makes these resources an equivalent form of capital.

Enterprise and workplace

We can't know how a world without money will organize its wealth production, but one thing that seems fairly obvious is that enterprises as we know them will become history once no one has to work for a living anymore. This makes one suspect that a participatory economy (as in *Looking Forward*) would not in fact eliminate the constraints capitalism places on production:

...if Northstart workers request and receive significant workplace changes that dramatically improve quality of worklife at Northstart, this benefit will eventually be shared with other workers. How much work anyone does away from his or her

main workplace depends on the quality of work differentials between that main workplace and society's average (p 98).

Note the phrase, "main workplace." This raises the question, how would participatory economics confront an availability of labor power that simply overwhelmed the operating requirements of all workplace facilities put together? Capitalism—with its artificially engineered "scarcity" of resources—implies one ratio of world population to labor, based on profit for the few. Producing and distributing wealth on that basis "freezes" positions into the hard form of jobs.

The concept of jobs, in other words, is pegged to a pattern of output and distribution associated with the poverty of the majority; multiplying jobs to give everyone around the world access to comfortable and decent living conditions amounts therefore to little more than achieving a condition of full employment and devising an idealized agenda for capitalist development. A "main" workplace is a job, after all, albeit one that has been reconfigured into a "balanced job complex." A socialist economy (operating without even the use of "personal 'credit card' computers") implies a relatively productive workforce—but who makes up that workforce? If the entire population of the world can, by turns, produce an abundance of the things it needs, with a surplus governed by both long- and short-term necessity, the notion of "jobs" becomes hopelessly anachronistic. There are just too many hands for too little work.

An economy based on the job-concept would not be free, in any event, to respond to the variable pressures that will predictably be exerted on society by the needs of the world's population. It would be tied to fixed scales of production and consumption that would hamper the continual re-negotiation of resource flows between localities and regions. The "job" also retains its odor of sacrifice and pain even under the most humane conditions:

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Thus, when innovations *significantly diminish the burdensomeness of work* at one plant, the result, after job balancing committees have time to assess the change, is that each employee spends fewer hours there and more hours elsewhere. Innovations that make Northstart work relatively more pleasurable will change the time Northstart workers work there and elsewhere. So because of the principle that all workers enjoy comparable overall job responsibilities, gains accruing from Northstart investments manifest themselves in slightly improved conditions for *all workers* rather than in dramatically improved conditions only for Northstart employees (p 98). [My emphasis]

Income, prices, transactions

The authors have an awkward problem (which they admit to leaving unsolved) suggesting how society might bring about the participatory economy they describe. This is not too surprising once you understand that they are simply looking at all the things that are wrong with capitalism and reasoning backwards to mentally rearrange the system so it will cease to "malfunction." The resulting schema thus becomes something to sell people on rather than the outcome of their bitter experience leavened by an insurgent and irrepressible sense of humanity. The authors use the example of a "third world" publishing house, Simón Bolívar, and its evolution through capitalist and "coordinator" (state-capitalist) changes of régime to illustrate how hierarchies in the workplace relate to the class division in society (p 44).

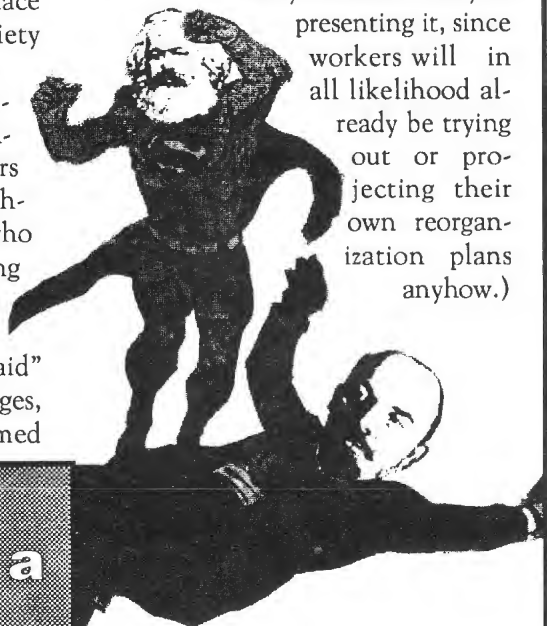
This seems to imply that participatory economics translates as high-level subsistence—where workers get paid enough to live on, but without their employers determining who is worth how much. In describing "the transition from coordinator to participatory economics," they make a reference to "lower-paid" workers. This of course means wages, and incomes tied to work performed

reflect the operations of the marketplace: the buying and selling of commodities, in particular of people's working abilities.

The transition "to" a participatory economy seemingly begins from a point within the wages system, then. Removing the element of hierarchy from work is certainly a key feature of a post-market economy; but the authors seem to be saying that this is enough to rid society of social classes.

The appropriate place to begin eradicating class distinctions is at the heart of the system of production, where capital reproduces itself through the formation of surplus value. This eradication is a once-only act, historically unique and fatal to the whole market cycle. The problem of the "transition" is one of education before getting to this point, not of consciousness-raising "on the job." Workers need to know that capital is an undesirable factor in the production process, that the consequence of eliminating the basis for its formation—the payment of wages—will be the immediate introduction of a moneyless economy, and that reorganization of the economy inherited from the capitalist marketplace will inexorably follow whether anyone wants it to or not. (This is an admittedly schematic way of

presenting it, since workers will in all likelihood already be trying out or projecting their own reorganization plans anyhow.)



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The ultimate fatality resulting from a revolution in thought and experience which proceeds this way will be the concept of "income" itself. The elimination of hierarchy as an organizing principle will simply impose itself as something unavoidably necessary for a system aimed at satisfying human needs even to work.

—AR

ON SECOND THOUGHT

From the Western Socialist

The object of production under socialism will be to fulfill the needs of everyone in as pleasurable a way as possible. Occupations that cause suffering or injure health will be abandoned as, under such a society, people will be reasonable and will prefer to do without those things, the production of which causes suffering. On the other hand, as the human brain is infinite in its capacity for invention, society will foster the contrivance of all means to eliminate danger, disease and ugliness from productive operations. Now-a-days inventions are not put to use unless the owners of the means of production can make profit out of the use of them, because profit is the motive of production today and things are only produced if they are expected to bring profit. Under socialism no one will reap a profit from the use of inventions because things will only be produced because they are useful; the profit motive will have been eliminated. The good of the people will be the motive and the stimulus, and inventors will be free to contrive to their hearts' content, conscious of the fact that their means of living will be assured. Personal satisfaction and the approbation of their fellows, the most powerful incentives of all, will be their fitting reward.

Under socialism the ugly factories in ugly surroundings will disappear, as will also the ugly houses and ugly slums. The whole of the people owning and controlling their own means of production will have a mutual interest in making work and living conditions as pleasant as it is possible for humanity to make them. Making things will not longer be monotonous toil but will become the pleasure that people take in making things for their own satisfaction.

—"A Glimpse at Socialism,"
April 1947

Burned out and six feet under

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) discovered a while back that homicide tops the list of occupational hazards causing job-related deaths among women in the U.S. "Violence is a contagious disease," as H.G. Wells once said. On average, 158 female wage-slaves in the U.S. lose their lives each year serving the capitalist class. The CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health division chalks up this phenomenon to women working in retail sector jobs and to a lack of safety precautions like better lighting, safer cash handling, bullet-proof barricades and the like. Despite their medical expertise, they are being most unscientific in distinguishing symptoms from causes in this morbidly. Even Mahatma Gandhi had a better grasp of cause and effect, as we can see from his diagnosis: "Poverty is the worst form of violence."

So long as we live in a society where one must buy life's necessities, there will always be a desperate compulsion to acquire money by any means possible. Why are women in this dangerous position of confronting desperate robbers to begin with? The same reason. Like their killers, they too must make the acquisition of money a top priority to live

in this capitalist set-up. For the ruling (capitalist) class will have it no other way. No reform or precaution will change this objective fact of competitive society. It can't help but breed violence and death.

Dr. Catherine Bell, an epidemiologist with the CDC, alluded to the trends in the sexual division of labor as a contributing factor. She inadvertently indicted the conditions of labor in general as a systematic killer of the working class. "Part of it may be that women tend to be employed in places where the risk of homicide is elevated instead of places where they are likely to be electrocuted or crushed or killed in traffic accidents."

Right to self-obliteration

Life's little career trade-offs! You can risk being murdered at the cash register, or you can utilize your "right" to equal employment and increase your chances of being electrocuted, crushed or wiped out in a traffic accident! Only in a free (to exploit) society can such challenging choices of self-obliteration be put before us. The CDC report finds that most on-the-job fatalities involve male workers dying from the above-mentioned non-homicidal causes. Whether from a robber's gun or a boss's job re-

quirement, the end result is the same.

Violence at the workplace is clearly a problem symptomatic of the class oppression of both sexes in general. It is the quest for profits that makes production (and work generally) a life-threatening activity. It is the artificially imposed poverty that compels the working class to run the gauntlet daily. Each day many are struck down. The hazardous conditions in which this takes place are only symptomatic of the disease, not the cause of it. The disease is capitalism.

Capitalism, with its parasitic ruling class that owns and controls the means and instruments of production: subjecting the overwhelming majority to inhuman conditions like violent competition, pay-as-you-go insecure housing, second-rate food, dangerous daily amounts of stress. The list of these symptoms could go on and on; capitalism creates countless avenues of misery for the human condition.

The cure for this ailment is socialism, and it begins with socialist consciousness. The administration of this cure includes you. Your clinic is the World Socialist movement. With enough house calls and mass inoculations, we can witness the eradication of this morbid scourge in our lifetimes!

—WJ Lawrimore

Continued from last page

the military—the legendary "peace dividend"—now that the end of the Cold War has pushed the military-industrial complex out on a very shaky limb.

No stake in their wars

Workers the world over—including anyone who works for anyone else and gets paid for it, or who *would* work if the market let them—have no stake in fighting wars for their employers. No one has a stake in exposing himself or herself to the material possibility of death, disease, poisoning or mutilation (or other violent outcomes)—let alone inflicting these on total strangers. Even psychopathic killers (excepting

those who run the machinery of state) don't have a "stake" in destroying their victims—and neither do workers given military uniforms to wear.

But more than that, people who in their capitalist-system incarnation have to work to get money *do* have a stake in creating a world order that really is new, and one that completely transcends any projects their employers may have in mind: one based on common ownership of the means of production, *globally*, with production for use, not profit. The promised "peace dividend" is a weak and ironic echo of the needs capitalism paves over with its ambitious, dehumanizing projects. Even in the absence of war, the mind-wasting automatism of the wages

system exacts a terrible toll not just in terms of health, sanity and options foregone but also in terms of generating anti-social models of behavior such as racism, sexism and homophobia.

Even without war between capitalist states, the chronic war between the classes that passes for "peace" in the propaganda system destroys lives in numerous partial ways. In a world without wages, no one will be a "worker" because no one will be a boss; when you go to another country, you won't have to show anyone either a passport or the barrel of a gun. Nobody will be obliged to meet interesting people and kill them.

—AD

As the second world war drew to a close, the United States had already conceived a new order for the post-war world: one which it dominated as the pre-eminent super-power. Documents and statements of the period allow us to piece together the existence of such an outlook. The completely intact infrastructure of the U.S., coupled with the devastation wrought on its competitors in Europe and the Soviet Union and the emerging nuclear weapons technology, produced a breezy sense of world supremacy within the capitalist class.

Ironically, the formation of a "defense industry" (a permanent war sector) in the economy of the United States was the very factor that ensured the prosperity of its two former enemies, Germany and Japan. But success did not come without its price:

For 40 years the American economy hasn't had to function without this crutch, and no one really knows whether it can. Defense dollars underwrote the development of computers, electronics, telecommunications and lots of other high-tech research, but relying on the Pentagon as a major buyer may also have contributed to the deterioration of American manufacturing. ["Protecting the Pentagon," William Greider in *Rolling Stone*, 10/4/90 (excerpted in *Utne Reader* March/April 1991).

Gun-for-hire

And so hegemony came at last in 1991, but only when the decisive period for building on it had already passed. The U.S. is now officially hanging out its shingle as the world's Gun-for-Hire. "The Pentagon," says an Associated Press writer in the *Boston Globe* (3/9/92), "wants to keep the United States as the world's only superpower and dissuade Japan, the European Community and other powers from challenging its international dominance, *The New York Times* reported yesterday...the US mission will be partly 'convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role or pursue a more aggressive posture to protect their legitimate interests.'"

If anyone thought the end of the

Bushs Kampf



(read His lips!)



Hitler's concealment of his aims and his use of appealing propaganda slogans ("peace policy") deceived well-wishers



domestically and abroad for a long time, to the point of sanctioning the crises he engineered (even though with some disapproval of his methods; Munich conference, 9/29/38).



Hitler, however, viewed these outcomes as mere stages in a progression leading up to war. (*Der Volks Brockhaus* (1981), "Hitler," p 343)



Cold War meant anything approaching nuclear disarmament, let them eat warheads! "The document also says [the writer continues] the United States must continue to aim nuclear arms at 'those assets and capabilities that current—and future—Russian leaders or other nuclear adversaries value most.'" The newness of this world order is in any event questionable, since the Pentagon document reported in the *Times* frets over the provocation of an "unwanted Japanese response."

Z Magazine's February 1991 "Gulf Report: Why War" lists the following two items, notable for both their cynicism and their candor—

[Item #1:] In the London *Financial Times* of November 21 [1990], a respected commentator describes the Gulf crisis as a "watershed event in U.S. international relations," which will be seen in history as having "turned the U.S. military into an internationally financed public good." In the 1990s, he continues, "there is no realistic alternative [to] the U.S. military assuming a more explicitly mercenary role than it has played in the past. [Item #2:] The financial editor of the *Chicago Tribune* recently put the point less delicately: we must exploit our "virtual monopoly in the security market...as a lever to gain funds and economic concessions" from Germany and Japan. The U.S. has "cornered the West's security market" and will therefore be "the world's rent-a-cops."

Not bad for a country whose Maximum Leader was at about the same time playing on everyone's patriotic

heartstrings to aim them as killers at the workers of Iraq and their "second Hitler," Saddam Hussein! Despite

the absurdity of the comparison, the Bush administration in certain respects finds itself a far better-qualified claimant to heir-apparent of the Nazis than any of its client dictators.

The Blitzkrieg concept

As the Gulf war demonstrates, the Blitzkrieg concept has become the cornerstone of a policy for holding down or annihilating one's thieving competitors in struggles for the control of markets. And what—functionally speaking—is the difference between the unprecedented weapons stockpiling of the Reagan-Bush era and the Nazi rearmament preceding world war two? (Quantity, perhaps?) Like their Nazi counterparts in the Spanish civil war, the American Republicrats welcomed an opportunity to test some nifty new megadeath systems with politically safe "near-nuclear" capabilities on Iraq's captive (sub-human) population.

It takes a capitalist imagination to devise plans like these, and a capitalist discipline applied with the full force of a fine-tuned propaganda system. It is the diseased thought processes of the capitalist class that turn ordinary people into depraved enemies intent on committing mass murder. The same capitalist imagination skews the picture so selectively that individuals who commit mass murder *without permission from the authorities* are branded as enemies of society (and the state), whereas those who actually refuse to commit it upon command (as conscientious objectors) often get either ignored or imprisoned for their pains.

The demolition of Iraq had not only the objective of assuring U.S. control of oil supplies in the Middle East region and the legitimization of the Pentagon's new role as Rent-a-General Headquarters, but also the deflation of any public demands for downscaling

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