

IN HOPES OF THE IMMINENT DEMISE OF WORLD CAPITALISM ...FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS PENDING

Fifty years ago today, the Wall Street crash occurred, sending the international economy into depression; even now, the memory of the Great Depression continues to haunt the defenders of the American economic order - the capitalist order. It has become part of modern mythology. Just take a look at all the Black Tuesday commemorations the "experts" are grinding out - if nothing else, they agree that the crash spelled an end to all the fairy tales of unlimited prosperity and equally unlimited "free enterprise". The managers of the system have made much of the lessons learned from 1929; beneath the rhetoric of new deals, new frontiers, and great societies, we can see that capitalism has indeed changed. Through massive state intervention in the economy, capitalism has developed certain mechanisms aimed at preventing a repetition of the events of 1929. The Stock Market, formerly a pivotal point in the economy, is now only one institution within an expanded field of corporate and state domination.

However, no matter how planned its structures may be, the capitalist system is not immune to crises. The Stock Market panic of several weeks ago served to reveal its continued vulnerability. Its loyal servants are aware that they cannot control the system's chronic ups and downs (now given the antiseptic name of "business cycles"). The most they can hope for is to "manage" or "stabilize" them, but all their solutions can only be temporary. The present recession is an example of how the capitalist policy-makers have to resort to a planned deflation of the economy in order to "wring" inflation out of the system. Another attempt to square the circle - remember Gerald Ford and his WIN buttons? The speculators in fool's gold notwithstanding, the only ones who will "profit from the recession" will be, in the long run, the big corporations.

The question that brings the present crisis into focus is one that all the business periodicals and forecasts will never get around to answering - how does it affect us as human beings? We are the ones who suffer the material and psychological consequences of all the decisions made coolly and unemotionally in the executive suites - our lives are behind all the graphs and statistics and projections. In the social marketplace of capitalism, we ourselves are the prime commodities.

As we walk through the cities, we find ourselves on an equal level - face to face - with the objects in the store windows, whose prices always seem to be increasing more rapidly than our own. More and more, "making ends meet," however sad and trivial a goal it may be, is the only one that we can achieve. Leftists talk of the apocalyptic "final crisis" of capitalism - a comforting fantasy, perhaps, but social reality contradicts it. The system will never fall apart of its own accord at some given moment - it always manages to survive the catastrophes it causes while remaining as strong as ever. People even take it for granted that it will; some firmly believe in the necessity and virtue of the same system that screws them over. Fortified by this or that guru or "philosophy of success," they proclaim their own imaginary freedom. Yet even the most tempting illusions produced by capitalism's dream factory are, like any decent conjuring trick, carried out with mirrors.

However much we fool ourselves into thinking that everything that goes on is somehow in our interest, have we ever asked ourselves what our real interests are? If we do this, we will find that what seems to be done for our "benefit" actually binds us to the system more and more. We become dependent on it to do everything for us, to give us work, to fix an "appropriate" wage with the help of "our" unions, to redress our grievances, to take care of our kids, to give us hand-outs when we can't work. But the system is unable to accomplish these things - the jobs are boring and unfulfilling, the wages are never enough, the schools are falling apart, and high unemployment is now permanent, with fewer and fewer capitalist "social services" to alleviate it.

In a period of social crisis, people begin to think of real alternatives to the existing order and to challenge those institutions that they previously took for granted. In so doing, they meet other people with common needs and common desires, attempting to create a new social environment in which these can be discussed. The anti-nuclear movement's implicit assault on capitalist technology is an example of this process. However, the system has yet to be questioned in its entirety. Capitalism can survive many things, but it cannot easily survive a wholesale attack on its legitimacy, on its self-granted right to exist. Far from being dead, capitalism is very much alive, but so are the people who will have to make its funeral arrangements. Beyond merely "smashing capitalism," as the slogan has it, we must get rid of all the ingrained habits, ideas, and behaviors that have made it possible not only for a small part of society to dominate the vast majority, but for individuals to dominate each other. Actions such as the present one are only a beginning. Others will no doubt find better ways to express their discontent. The road to a social revolution is long and difficult. But one thing is for sure - we cannot afford to wait 50 more years.

STANDARD & POOR
1539 HAIGHT ST.
SAN FRANCISCO, CA. 94117