

# **World Socialist Review**

a voice of world socialism

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## **NO FUTURE FOR YOU**

### *in this issue:*

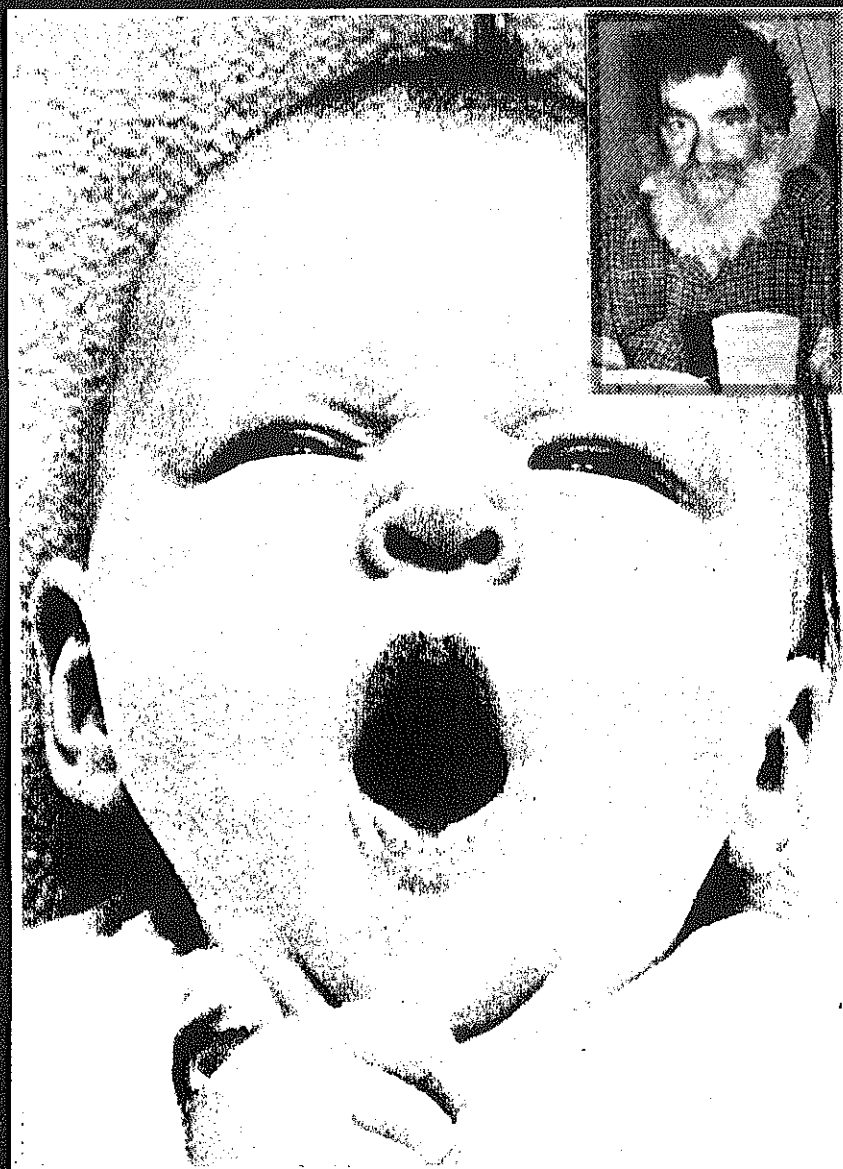
On the Brink  
Self-Management &  
State Capitalism

Under the Gun in  
El Salvador

The Rich Get  
Richer

Capitalism vs.  
Community

The Suicide Machine



# Too Lazy To Work?

Everybody seems to be upset these days about welfare. The percentage of Americans who live—somehow—on welfare monies seems to be steadily mounting, and a rising outcry is heard against the imagined throng of lazy rascals among them who simply do not want to work but who would rather live off the backs of the taxpayers.

Now, there are a couple of interesting oddities about this and about other conclusions, by many, on the issue of welfare. Take, for example, the case of the so-called lazy bums who do not work simply because they do not want to work. Nobody would argue that 100 per cent of the unemployed are simply too lazy to work. There are always a few, it is acknowledged, who are honest and industrious, but who cannot find jobs. The worst diehard enemy of welfare would admit to this.

But the strange thing about this assessment is the fact that immediately one wonders why those few honest and industrious among the welfare recipients cannot find jobs. If 90 per cent of the unemployed don't work only because they do not want to work, it should follow, logically, that there must be a great number of jobs that are available. Why, then, would the 10 per cent find any difficulty in locating the anxious, would-be employers of their labor? Something funny about that argument, isn't there?

What upsets socialists about welfare, is something altogether different than the usual complaint. We do think it is a shame, of course, that so many Americans must get by on the skimpy income allotted by welfare while it is continually drilled into their heads that they live in the

richest country in the world. And yet this is not nearly so upsetting to us as is the knowledge that the real recipients of welfare are not at all those who make up the official roles. The one in seven or one in six, or whatever the figure may be, who wait from month to month for the welfare checks are working class people, even though they may be unemployed for reasons of physical disabilities or for any other reasons. The real recipients of welfare (and what welfare they receive!) are the members of the capitalist class. And here there is no one in seven or one in six figure, either. In this case the percentage is one in one, or 100 per cent. Let's look into this proposition.

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*a voice of world socialism*

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There is only one way to create wealth. That is by applying physical and mental energy to raw materials. Now this sort of activity is the function of the working class, not the capitalists. The function of the capitalist class is to own the industries and to employ those who don't

own the means of wealth production to work in them. True, there are capitalists who work and who draw salaries. But they do not work for a living. They could, and in fact do, employ substitutes for themselves for less than their own salaries—substitutes who have degrees in Business from the finest schools in the world. The \$50,000 (or whatever) per year they draw from their business as the salary of management would hardly pay their liquor bills. Any capitalist worth talking about can—and frequently does—spend far more on one social gathering than a welfare recipient could gross in an entire lifetime on welfare.

So what, you may ask, is the point? The point is that if people do not work—and most of the able-bodied adult members of the capitalist class either do not work at all or occupy some managerial function as a hobby—then somebody must be supporting them. They don't eat their money or their certificates of wealth-ownership. They are supported, and in style, by those who do all the work—many of whom, from time to time, must hold out their hands for crumbs of tax money during periods of unemployment. Let's straighten out our perspective. Let's organize to abolish welfare for unemployed workers and for the permanently unemployed capitalist class. Let's unite for world socialism.

—Harmo

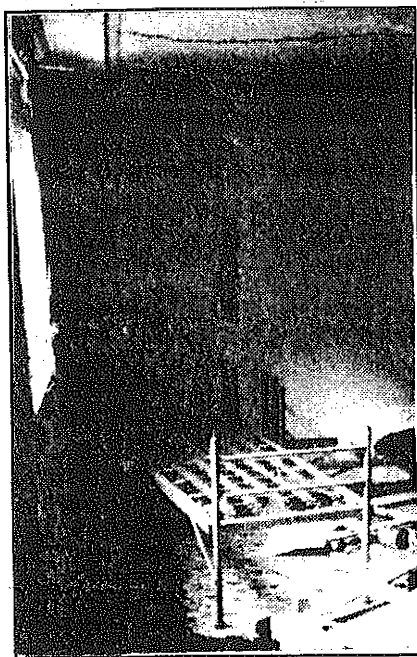
Originally published as "Who's on Welfare?" in *The Perspective for World Socialism* (1974), a selection of WSP radio talks.

**IF SOME WILD-EYED LOOKING MAN** with a long beard and ragged clothes approached you in the park with a dire warning that nearly 19 million Americans could be homeless by the year 2003, would you just ignore him and shrug off the whole episode? Probably you would. But no less a body than the Congress of the United States commissioned a study—carried out by an academic from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—drawing this very conclusion. [Jonathan Kozol, "A Reporter at Large: The Homeless and their Children—I," *The New Yorker*, 1/25/88.]

In a social order where life depends on getting money, you might think money would always be forthcoming. This would demonstrate that spending money was as natural an act as eating, sleeping or swimming. In a social order in which "life" means "earning a living" (for the majority), you might think everyone could count on finding some kind of domicile. And this would in turn demonstrate that money was a rational survival tool. (Having a domicile costs money, of course.) Unfortunately, capitalism is *not* a rational social order; the market system guarantees no one an income sufficient to cover *any* of life's basic necessities—certainly not a home, which is one of the most expensive. "Between 1978 and 1980," Kozol writes, "median rents rose 30 per cent for households with incomes below \$300,000. Half of these people paid nearly three-quarters of their income for their housing. Forced to choose between housing and food, many families in this situation soon were driven to the streets. That was only a beginning. After 1980, rents rose at even faster rates."

This 1988 article, in fact, often reads like a re-edition of Engels' *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. Kozol writes:

In the past seven years, homelessness has become a nationwide phenomenon. The homeless are not just in midtown Manhattan. They are also in the streets of Phoenix, Salt Lake City, Philadelphia, San Antonio, Miami and St. Paul. They are in the Steel Belt. They are in the sun Belt. They are in Kansas City and in Seattle. In Denver, where evictions rose 800 per cent in 1982—a consequence of unemployment, insufficient numbers of low-income housing units and the influx of poor families seeking work that they could not find in the East—hundreds of families were locked into waiting lists for public housing. Many were forced to live in shelters or on the streets. In Cleveland, in one classic situation, a worker's being laid off caused the loss of his home and then the dissolution of his family....



**The "Housing Question"**

## On the Brink

The income needed to buy or rent a home is derived either from profits or wages (which includes everything from professional remuneration to hourly rates for casual labor), depending on whether or not you own any means of production. Labor power generates profits at the point of production, profits generate wages in the market, and wages regenerate labor power. Various subsidies to non-working or otherwise needy workers have been imposed on capital since the New Deal, such as social security, food stamps, Medicare, unemployment and workmen's compensation, housing projects, welfare programs, etc. But as a general rule, unemployed persons don't get paid, the market is oblivious to their presence, and their living requirements are not acknowledged. Underemployed persons find themselves in essentially the same predicament.

But finding a home is no simple matter in a market-based society. Not only will no houses get built if there is no profit in building them; no one will get paid enough to be able to buy or rent them if capital cannot profitably employ any wage-earners. It is perfectly possible for houses and apartments to stand empty at the same time as workers are searching frantically for a place to live. An expanding economy might provide a cushion for the worker, but not a contracting or "reindustrializing" one.

Since 1980, homelessness has changed its character. What was once a theatre of the grotesque—shopping-bag ladies in Grand Central Terminal, winos sleeping in the dusty sun outside the Grey-

hound station in El Paso—has grown into the common misery of millions. "This is a new population," an advocate for the homeless in Massachusetts said not long ago. "Many are people who were working all their lives. When they lose their jobs, they lose their homes. When they lose their homes, they start to lose their families, too." Even in New York City, which has a more or less permanent population of long-term unemployed, 50 per cent of the people who were served at city shelters during 1984 were there for the first time. Roughly the same percentage holds throughout the nation. ["The Homeless and their Children"]

Empty houses and apartments (or even empty lots) likewise can't be given away to those with no homes: the same class arrangements which make it undesirable to employ "too many" people also make it undesirable to relinquish potentially (or even marginally) lucrative real estate by making it available to the homeless. For example, in November 1987, MIT had the police evict, amid sledge hammers and violence, the homeless population of a 33 day-old squatter settlement (The Tent City Community) that had set up on its property. MIT needed the land to construct a two-million-square-foot development project known as University Park. Tent City residents weren't after the whole two million square feet: all they asked was to be allowed to move into three university-owned homes that had lain vacant for eight years.

Annually, 2.5 million people annually lose their homes, although some of this number eventually find other housing. The number of homeless people in the United States could be as high as two or three million. But from a capitalist perspective, the "housing question" affects only consumers equipped with spending money. A front-page headline in *The Wall Street Journal* for February 5, 1988 apprised us of

**A Dream Deferred. Even With Good Pay, Many Americans Are Unable to Buy a Home. Percentage of Owners Drops For First Time Since '30s As Prices Outpace Salaries.**

*The Journal's* statistics were scrubbed sparkling clean: "Nationally, home prices rose 108 per cent between 1976 and 1986 while median family income rose 97 per cent. The median price for new and existing homes hit \$108,000 last fall, up 17 per cent from a year before...." If we consider three trends that have emerged in contemporary capitalism, however, *The Journal's* reasoning sounds curiously out of touch:

- All during the 70s and 80s, capital has been running away overseas in search of those hordes of ideal workers who will

**Continued on p. 17**

# Self-Management and State Capitalism

**THROUGHOUT THE STATE-CAPITALIST WORLD**, the scramble is on. A trend which has been a long time maturing in the policies of governments identifying themselves as "Marxist-Leninist"—the introduction of "market socialism"—is at last reaching the political surface. In Poland Solidarity has won a "crushing victory" and now has "control of the upper house, or Senate" according to an article in the *Boston Sunday Globe* [6/11/89],<sup>1</sup> which means that eventually it will be taking its turn at being used to sell the workers their poverty pills. Paraphrasing statements made by Bronislaw Geremek ("Lech Walesa's key political adviser") at a campaign meeting, the writer tells us that

The election involves Solidarity in the direction of Polish society and gives Poland a chance to move toward genuine democracy and a Western-style free-market economy. But it can only happen in an evolutionary, step-by-step process. Solidarity must not be pushed into a corner by too many expectations, and, like it or not, Solidarity is going to have to cooperate with the party leaders who have done everything they can since 1981, including martial law, jail and murder, to keep Solidarity from having a hand in how Poland is run.

But this gives the impression that the issue is either political democracy vs economic development or independent vs "company" trade unions. While both of these elements are present, more is afoot than that. What the writer does not mention (or perhaps never knew) is that on July 26, 1981 Solidarity's national leadership adopted a resolution declaring its "full support for the social movement for workers' self-management" and urged the union to back "the establishment of workers' councils as the essential

force for the struggle for economic reform."<sup>2</sup> This declaration was the outcome of a proposed "Law of Social Enterprise" put forward by the "Network" of pilot workplace organizations, a "horizontal structure" which appeared in mid-April of that year, based in the workforces of 17 major factories throughout Poland.<sup>3</sup> The "social enterprise" it advocated was both an "economic unit and.... a fundamental form of property in the means of production" (apart from cooperatives, private enterprises and state enterprises)—a concept which "immediately gained enormous popularity," as Zbigniew Kowalewski put it.

## Unpopular with the government

The government slapped a label of "anarcho-syndicalist" on the Network, claiming that it sought to "align" itself with the Yugoslav reforms of the 1950s. (This was not an altogether strange assertion, since the inspiration for Yugoslavia's brand of "market socialism" grew out of a Republican-Communist alliance during the Spanish civil war against the National Labor Confederation (CNT), which sought to legitimize and coordinate worker-led takeovers of factories and other workplaces in Catalonia in the wake of their hastily departing Francoist owners. Although it had been caught by surprise, the CNT saw this an opportunity to implement directly its theory of self-management.) (See box)

The Network laid a strong emphasis on market economics, not for theoretical reasons but arguing that the Soviet Union would not tolerate an economy being run under its very nose by workers' councils in the enterprises. Kowalewski summarizes the Network's position as follows:

The law of value.... cannot be suppressed in a post-capitalist economy. It has to wither away, in parallel with other

market categories, including the buying and selling of labor power. The re-establishment, to a certain extent, of the operation of the law of value as an element of control over the plan, is one of the indispensable objectives of reform of economic management in the revolution against the bureaucratic régime. [p 34]

Avoiding the "Yugoslav trap" (that is, the inability of the Yugoslav economy to liberate itself from the imperatives of capital accumulation) became a major theme of the discussion. Karol Modzelewski, a leader of Solidarity in Lower Silesia, argued that everything hinged on "the way in which the power over distribution and utilization of the surplus product which belongs to society as a whole is exercised, and.... who exercises control over that distribution."

The notion that Poland has a "post-capitalist" economy, with a surplus product belonging to society as a whole, is quaint enough in itself; but the idea that a "surplus product" should be "held in trust" at all (responsibly or abusively) involves a serious misconception. In a *real* socialist/communist society there can be no "law of value," because there will be no buying and selling of goods and services: and *this* is the only "post-capitalist" kind of economy there can be. The workers of the Network were falling into the same old delusion that labor can manage capital (which certainly is the theory in Yugoslavia). Their use of the phrase "post-capitalist" betrays, besides, an acceptance of the Leninist myth that the state can manage a market economy—claiming at the same time to have abolished the market—without this making it a capitalist one; that this arrangement constitutes the lower end of a long-term transition to "full communism"; and that the difference between capitalism and socialism/communism is chiefly an ideological one.

## A variant theory

Self-management, reduced to its content and taken to its radical limits is, in fact, a variant theory of common ownership of the means of production. In its rigorous form self-management is advocated by lib-

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world socialist review/ 4

ertarian communists, and its difference with common ownership lies mainly in the arguments made on how to bring it about (overthrowing the state vs. taking it over). But the term is also used widely as a way to describe running an enterprise in a market system (as in Yugoslavia), or alternatively as a "dual-power" model of class struggle (Ernest Mandel).<sup>5</sup>

There is a Yugoslav author—J.E. Dirlan—who actually does claim that labor can manage capital: "The Yugoslav system of social ownership and workers' self-management can be viewed as one in which labor employs capital, instead of a system in which capital employs labor, as is the case under capitalism."<sup>6</sup> The writer quoting him—Gerry Hunnius—adds by way of explanation: "Theoretically all citizens possess ownership rights and delegate authority to manage property to autonomous enterprises and institutions which in turn are managed by the workers directly or through their elected organs of self-management." [p 274, emphasis in the original]

The semblance of a paradox in the above is merely apparent, however. If we say that capital employs labor, we mean that funds for paying wages are set aside by the capitalists (those who make investments with a fund of capital) out of profits. For labor to employ capital, on the other hand, could only mean that wage-earners (who depend for their living on someone paying them for exercising their ability to do work, i.e., who are employed) arrange for the accumulation of capital to be carried out primarily for the sake of their wages. How does one go about employing one's employers? Capital is not accumulated to pay wages to workers; nor are capitalists ever laid off when wages go down. Wages are inherently subordinate to profits. The fact that the capital-labor nexus exists is itself proof that capital always has the upper hand; and it is no revolution to rhetorically defend the sacrosanct rights of working people while letting them be exploited for the sake of some "higher good."

Hunnus writes that "integration of the plans and activities of individual enterprises [in Yugoslavia] is now increasingly being transferred to autonomous associations of producers, economic chambers and other groups.... This transfer of government functions to autonomous associations of producers is one step toward the final goal of the 'withering away of the state.'" [p 274] The state, unfortunately, is also the "executive committee of the capitalist class," which means that unless capital is first abolished as a political act, the state will always have a market economy to regulate and to thrive on. The author implies that capitalism without the state (if it could be achieved) would amount to communism (or socialism). Construing Marx's famous phrase in a narrowly technical sense like this displays no

## The CNT and "Socialization of the Economy"<sup>7</sup>

...the CNT had never proposed that factories or other facilities would be owned by the people who happen to work there. The CNT's program had called for the construction of "libertarian communism." This would not consist of producers operating independently of each other on the basis of market exchange. An industry would be managed democratically by its workforce but as a kind of "subcontract" from the whole community. The aim of production would not be to sell products to make money but to provide the community with goods and services that are useful.

Since society's entire workforce would "own" the means of production, all would have a right to share in the output. This would mean that the economy would no longer be regulated by the market, but by social needs. However, this type of "socialization" of the economy would not mean top-down State management of production, as in the Soviet Union, but direct decision-making by the workforce.

The needs and collective desires of the populace would be articulated through a process of collective decision-making that would begin with assemblies of all the workers in the various facilities—factories, farming communities, hospitals, etc. These assemblies would discuss and decide on proposals about the society's priorities for production, and they would elect delegates to take these proposals to regional and national worker Congresses, which would develop plans and priorities that would govern the entire economy.

Of course, the Congresses would only be in session periodically; the delegates would not be like professional politicians. Obviously, an on-going body would be needed to maintain the coordination and unity of the economy when the Congresses were not in session. The Spanish anarcho-syndicalists had proposed to set up regional and national Defense and Economics Councils, which would be elected by the rank-and-file of the various unions.... the Economics Council would provide the needed linkage between the various industries and regions. The Councils, however, would not be a hierarchical executive.

Instead, each industry would be self-governing. The Spanish libertarians proposed to merge all the facilities in each industry into a single organization, an Industrial Federation. The basic units would be the self-managed workplaces but the industrial federation would develop overall planning for the industry, the various workplaces would not be competing businesses.

Relations between people in society would no longer be regulated on the basis of buying and selling, and workers would have free access to the output of other workplaces. And, if buying and selling is no longer the principle of distribution, then money becomes unnecessary, the Spanish anarchists believed. This society based upon unified production according to collective decisions and the needs of the workforce was what the Spanish anarchists meant by "libertarian communism."

small ignorance of the subject.

But there are others who reinforce their ignorance with great learning. Branko Horvat, in his book, *The Yugoslav Economic System (The first labor-managed economy in the making)*,<sup>8</sup> gives us a cook's tour of self-management as practised in Yugoslavia. As he describes it, the Yugoslav economic system is an experiment which has evolved (since the 50s) out of workers' councils, elected managing boards (composed of at least 75 per cent production workers and acting as executive organ) and enterprise directors (originally appointed by the state but now recruited by competitive selection locally) into an elaborate set of marketing institutions, with control structures diffused broadly throughout the enterprise.

### "Classical free competition"

During the 50s and 60s, he states, the basis was laid for "classical free competition of numerous small enterprises," with the state systematically withdrawing from its former role of guiding the planning process. But without comprehensive planning, the result was only increasing chaos. This, he says, is why the process of integration was initiated:

Working collectives themselves had to res-

ume economic coordination in a state that was withering away. The circle of organizational development seemed closed. The process was started by a fully integrated, state-managed economy, passed through a period of radical decentralization, and is now moving toward another stage of full integration in the form of a labor-managed economy. [p 164]

The reader may be puzzled as to how all this differs objectively, in any essential respect, from traditional capitalism; and the clue to the mystery lies in the spectacles through which Yugoslav theoreticians view the concept of exploitation. Horvat summarizes: "Thus the Yugoslav variant of socialism appears to imply social ownership, self-management in the economy and the absence of nonlabor income and exploitation. The term 'working class'.... was [construed] to mean 'all working people who are participating in the social process of labor and in socialist economic relations.'" [p 20; emphasis added.] The author also actually believes that Yugoslavia has succeeded in abolishing the wages system by virtue of the enterprise's external autonomy combined with its internal democracy [p 24].

In this rose-colored view, exploitation is not referred to as expropriating the surplus value produced by others (which is where

**Continued on p. 18**



## Salvadoran Capitalism

# Under the Gun

**THE ACRONYMS OF THE** Salvadoran class struggle—which are frequently among the world's longest and most exotic—include one which was intended evidently to carry with it a connotation of combat: ARENA (Nationalist Republican Alliance), a name which suggests *arena de combate*. The brainchild of Roberto d'Aubuisson and the winner in last March's Salvadoran presidential elections, ARENA is well known as the party of the death squads and perhaps less well known as the party of El Salvador's "Fortune Fourteen" (the coterie of wealthy families who export coffee, cotton and other products and monopolize control of the Salvadoran state through the military).

ARENA has graduated from being merely a school for psychopaths to a political hit squad staffed directly by members of the capitalist class (the oligarchy). These newcomers are not just tokens. The development marks a reversion to the older style of domination, before it became necessary to hand over the repression of dispossessed peasants to the military—and with it, direct control of the state.

A century ago, the capitalists of El Salvador took their cue from the land grabs that were then the fashion among Liberals and instituted laws legalizing the seizure of farmlands, their conversion into coffee plantations and the "disciplining" of the surplus population thus created to work on their new plantations. They created a military machine specifically for this purpose. In time this machine became an all-encompassing vehicle of government, for the Liberals found they could not rule anymore without converting the military into a political party.

## The Alliance for Progress

After the second world war, Salvadoran economic development came under the tutelage of the United States, which, smarting

from the embarrassment of having inadvertently sponsored the Castro régime in Cuba, had launched the Alliance for Progress and was pushing broad-based industrialization (under the doctrine of import substitution) as a strategy for profit-making. This reflected the capitalist belief that poverty could not possibly be a cause of discontent, and a development policy which intensified the poverty of the workers would thus undercut their susceptibility to insidious doctrines of revolution "imported" from Russia. But the more development went ahead, it seemed, the more the workers (who had come to supplant the dispossessed peasant farmers as the principal exploited class) became difficult and uncooperative. The decade of the 70s witnessed an outpouring of organizing and reform efforts by the "working poor," culminating in a coup d'état by junior military officers, who set up a junta in October 1979.

## Government by terror

In El Salvador, terrorism has been raised to the level of a fine political art: beginning with the *matanza* (massacre) of 1932, when the army and the civilian guards slaughtered some 30,000 rural coffee workers and peasants made desperate by the depression. (The latter had let the newly formed Communist Party talk them into an uprising.) The myth of Communist infiltration was also added to the brew in 1932—a byproduct of having prevented the Leninists (led by Agustín Farabundo Martí, the namesake of today's FMLN) from taking office after they had won some electoral victories.<sup>1</sup> In the 60s and 70s, the CIA helped to foster the infrastructure of surveillance and extortion that later became the death squads.

Although coffee no longer forms the dominant source of the oligarchy's profits, most of El Salvador's workers remain rural,

or they have formed cooperatives (with encouragement from US development agencies); however, even this little bit smacks of "communism" to the high-strung Salvadoran capitalists. El Salvador was from early on Central America's most proletarianized economy, and the relatively violent methods by which the coffee barons carried out their initial expropriations over a century ago have ensured ever since that exploitation would always be carried out under the gun. Whenever it seemed they could afford the luxury, they would make a show of constitutional formality by having the generals operate as elected officials.

But the effervescence of the 70s, followed by the discrediting of the generals as a political force and the US's clumsy attempts to wrest the initiative from the burgeoning popular organizations,<sup>2</sup> created a situation of flux that could not be dealt with in the usual way. The right was forced temporarily to step up the repression in semi-clandestine fashion, working out of the ministry of Defense through the "security forces," even as US-inspired constitutional and agrarian reforms were being implemented over their heads by the nominal rulers in the junta. The Fourteen Families sulked in their tents all during the Duarte years (1984-1988). Taking advantage of the Christian Democrats' self-destructive alliance with the meddlers from Washington, the rich went from funding paramilitary pogroms to infusing d'Aubuisson's ARENA with wealth and influence—and their own presence—to the point where they could take over the Legislative Assembly in 1988.

## Massive voter abstentionism

This is the general backdrop against which the March presidential elections were "fought." Most of those eligible to vote abstained on the advice of the FMLN; ARENA supporters went to the polls in full force. (It is illegal—and possibly fatal—not to vote in El Salvador.)

The party downplayed its ultraright ideology and promised what Salvadorans appear to want most—change. ARENA promised peace, health, education and jobs to the voters. Apparently many Salvadorans hope that ARENA will be able to put the country back to work. [*In These Times*, 3/29/89]

If this is true, it demonstrates an astounding naïveté, for it is exactly what Duarte and the Christian Democrats had promised the voters in 1984, when he defeated d'Aubuisson—with a critical boost from the American Institute for Free Labor Develop-

ment (AIFLD).<sup>3</sup> Another critical factor was a pact he had made with the leaders of the agricultural cooperative organizations and labor unions, who apparently actually expected a Christian-Democratic government, once elected, to legislate in their behalf.

### Abolish wages and profits?

No political party in the election particularly encouraged Salvadoran workers to think in terms of abolishing the wages system. But the objection that El Salvador is not ready for such a revolution no longer holds any water; if anything, in terms of social organization, it is probably *better* suited for it at present than any of its neighbors. The first coffee barons, in militarizing the expulsion of peasants from their lands, set up an economic battering ram that pulverized the Salvadoran social fabric—in contrast to Honduras or Guatemala, where “development” was largely the work of the United Fruit Company up until the 1940s and kept most surplus value production in a potential condition. Class consciousness has reached a very acute stage of development in El Salvador.

On the other hand, where it concerns the formal, abstract side of class consciousness—having a theoretically defined point of view—Salvadoran workers have up to the present gotten no help from their leaders on the left. Common ownership of the means of wealth production (socialism) or anything claiming to resemble it is not on any leftwing agenda.

The FMLN, an umbrella organization uniting many diverse tendencies, can only maintain its cohesion as an opposition force by hewing to a cautious, diffident reformism, and the apparent belief of many of its leaders that its proposals contain some element of “socialism” comes nowhere close to a policy of common ownership of the means of wealth production. Assuming workers are successful in driving the oligarchy from El Salvador, their next set of rulers and employers will have their work cut out for them cutting a path back to competitiveness in the world’s markets. It is precisely because the current repression is directed against working-class organizing *as such* that the social space needed for socialist consciousness to emerge is missing. Salvadoran workers are currently fighting for a right to organize that workers in Europe won over a century ago.

Now it is ARENA’s turn to attempt to move the hour hand backwards; it is said to “enjoy considerable support not only among the upper classes but also among segments of the lower class and peasantry outside FMLN zones.” [*The Progressive*, February 1989]

Yet if there is really any belief that

things will change for the better under ARENA, it is difficult to guess on what the belief could be based. In a 1987 CISPES interview, the FMLN’s Salvador Samayoa (former minister of Education following the October 1979 coup) described then-president Duarte’s policies in these terms: “Over 80 per cent of the people want dialogue and a political solution to the war, while the [Duarte] government stubbornly persists in blocking the way to a political solution.... The Duarte government has sunk the nation into the worst economic crisis of our entire history. The standard of living of the whole population has deteriorated and the economy has contracted.... The economy is practically in chaos.... Nobody has expressed support for the government’s economic policies.” [April 1987] The alternatives proposed by ARENA do not exactly improve on this scenario. In fact, its chief distinction from the Christian Democrats has been to advocate denationalizing the banking and export industries.

### The workers in their place

Nor is ARENA inclined to act otherwise; Washington only cultivated the Christian Democrats for their ability to keep workers’ demands to a minimum, and the “extreme” right would hardly be proposing an alternative to *that*. AIFLD had been sent down (that is the only appropriate term for it) by the Reagan administration to combat independent trade unionism in El Salvador by forming “parallel” unions that would genuflect obediently whenever the government acted; meanwhile the government did its best to repress strikes (it was successful in 152 cases out of 155—*after* Duarte’s pact with the unions). When the umbrella structure set up by AIFLD, the UPD (Popular Democratic Unity), had the gall to protest its outrage at Duarte’s betrayal, AIFLD set about destroying its own creature by withdrawing all of its support and generating yet another puppet organization, the Confederation of Democratic Workers (CTD). Meantime, individual unions within the UPD had regrouped, in alliance with the disillusioned peasant cooperatives and other social groups, to form the National Unity of Salvadoran Workers (UNTS); this presently brings together some 102 organizations, including associations of slum dwellers.

After the October 1986 earthquake, which left 200,000 homeless, destroyed more than 22,000 homes and cost 38,000 jobs, no response was forthcoming from the Duarte government;

....whole families are huddled under plastic and stick shacks, the water system is contaminated, people are sick and unemployed... [Alert!, April 1987]

People in the slums of San Salvador are living on the sides of ravines or near sewage

lines; there is 71 per cent unemployment; people are forced to dig up garbage from the wholesale market, “pull up rotting fruit, bring it home and put it on their families’ tables,” according to Leonardo Hidalgo, president of the Council of Marginalized Communities (CCM) in San Salvador. [*Central America Reporter*, May 1989]

### Back to “Necessary Genocide”

ARENA, despite its recent facelift, stands poised to carry out or sanction a second “period of necessary genocide,”<sup>4</sup> which involves piling up corpses on the order of a hundred thousand and “remaking Salvadoran society in the next five years”—preferably along the lines of the “Guatemalan solution.”<sup>5</sup> “Freddy” Cristiani, El Salvador’s smooth-talking new millionaire president, is a Reagan rerun: long on will and short on options, the party wants both to reline its members’ pockets with their rightful loot (by slicing revenues off the national budget) and pay the army to fund an unprecedented increase in butchery, regimentation and terrorism—getting money from Washington to carry out similar aims that have made Guatemala virtually a pariah state (in terms of arms sales, at least).

The FMLN, for its part, talks a lot about adopting “a model that responds to the specific characteristics of our country” [*Central America Reporter*, December 1988], calling for the “participation of all social forces.” Opinion is nearly unanimous that the Center has collapsed; and even the FMLN’s enemies concede that the Front has become a formidable opponent. They now have “much greater influence and support” among the population<sup>6</sup> and have carried the war into the central parts of the country. A dramatic increase in repression now will have effects opposite to those it had at the end of the 70s, when the guerrilla movement existed, swelling its ranks with desperate workers persuaded that they have only poverty, torture and death to lose. The army’s resources have been stretched thin, and both recruits and morale are problematic.

But, as we said above, no one in El Salvador—from ARENA to the FMLN—is promising the workers a world to win. Radical social changes and “socialist ideals” are on the opposition agenda; and these are seemingly outweighed, for “centrist forces or small business,” by the looming threat to their interests posed by an oligarchy mounted on the back of a death-squad government. Few of the régime’s opponents in organized labor (urban or rural) are interested in something so sweeping as the total elimination of money from the spheres

**Continued on p. 17**

**7/summer 1989**

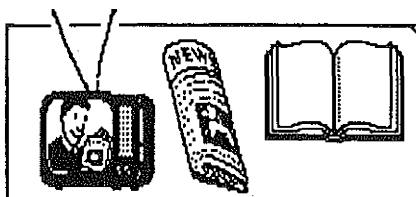
**YOU ARE A HUMAN BEING**, the center of innumerable impulses, desires and thoughts. What if you could find yourself in your own presence, witness yourself as a object acting independently of yourself as an observer? The strangeness of the effect would be astounding, as though in a dream: you would encounter yourself—turned into an inaccessible stranger, unable to affect or influence the behavior of this second you. Since the divorce would only be occurring between two phases of you, this image of yourself would seem disturbingly alien; in real life you would never regard yourself in such a split-apart fashion.

This very encounter actually does take place every day, at a collective social level, in a multitude of ways. The mass media engage in just such a daily exercise of presenting society with a reproduction of itself as a finished object. "That's the way it is," Walter Cronkite used to intone at the end of evening news broadcasts back in the 60s.

Cronkite's "it" referred to a thin slice of actions and events chosen very carefully and deliberately from among the vast mass of social processes going on continuously and interactively. All those processes were the outcome of impulses, feelings and thoughts of a whole world of people converted into the observable form of events, all of them interdependent and some of them being considered unusually important.

#### **Relationships with others**

You, on the other hand, are an individual (physically speaking) whose whole life is made up of these contacts with others. Not all of these contacts are personal: many of them are with institutions, other bundles of feelings and thoughts concentrated together from uncountable individual lives and given an official name. Some of these institutions are so important to the daily mobilization of your connections with others that they are considered to have general interest by those who make a business or profession of reporting on them; and they report to the large, anonymous collection of unknown, mutually estranged individuals like yourself, who receive the collective name of "the



## **THE WAY IT IS**

*Media and consciousness*

### **THE ILLUSION OF HISTORY**

audience" or "the public."

The picture of yourself that the mass media, day in and day out, invent for you (not as an individual with aspirations, fears, needs and ideas, but as an invisible, unacknowledged part of the same events being presented to you in the form of a picture of something inaccessible and external to yourself) is essentially this dreamlike image of you that we referred to above. In reality, you are watching yourself—mirrored in the actions of others,—but it is as though you could be emotionally disconnected from the others. The *picture* of reality excludes you as a (passive) onlooker. It is a you which you cannot touch or speak to—a reality to which you can relate either distantly or not at all: a reality you could not have made. It is an image of you which seems to have gotten out of your reach. (Oddly enough, it is also an image which you must buy.)

Reality thus becomes transformed into an alien "something" to which experts and professionals allow you partial, occasional and privileged access. You have no control over it (or them). You have been successfully "atomized": your emotional and intellectual contacts have been reduced to minuscule fractions of what perhaps you and certainly your great grandparents used to experience in direct relation to others every day.

#### **The ruling class**

The unreal atmosphere of a mental institution grips capitalist society. Within it, only the teased-up (often psychopathic) fantasies of the ruling élite are accorded the status of reality; everything else is either officially ignored or is integrated into these ruling

fantasies and is used to corroborate them.

"Outside" this media-wall are the horrors of a world (of yourself), the expression of whose needs is systematically overridden and suppressed because they cannot be fitted in to the narrow space of the profit system, either ideologically or economically, of which the mass media form a part. People are starving, for example, not because capitalism has made such a terrible mess of human existence: on the contrary, the mass media show capital-induced poverty as a natural condition from which capital (and only capital!) can rescue the world. The fact that not so long ago, before capitalist development arrived to "rescue" them, the parents and grandparents of these people were feeding themselves but were subsequently dispossessed of their lands so that new owners could have some of them plant and harvest crops for export has unaccountably been dropped from the record.

The media-wall is bounded by the marketplace, and what lies within it is limited to what the market can provide (to customers with money). "Outside" the wall nothing is guaranteed survival. The humanity that cannot fit into the narrow mold of the customer is "surplus" to reality.

#### **Exactly how real are you?**

The abridged and stilted reality of a world you only "watch" in passive mode and to which you cannot relate is thus a reality you did not make yourself. It is a reality devoid of communication between yourself and others, restrained instead to a thin and pale marketplace image of "it," provided anonymously by individuals whom you can never really know or influence. And it is a reality which blocks and retards your satisfaction, your ability to enjoy life.

It is, in short, not your reality at all. It is a reality of profit. As a human being, you owe it to yourself to replace it with a reality made by human beings for their own satisfaction: with a moneyless, marketless form of production—common ownership or socialism—that people can actually exercise full control over democratically. Not at all like the reality that has been made for us, by the decree of a few.

—A.R.

## The Rich Get Richer...

**WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE RICH** and other people poor?

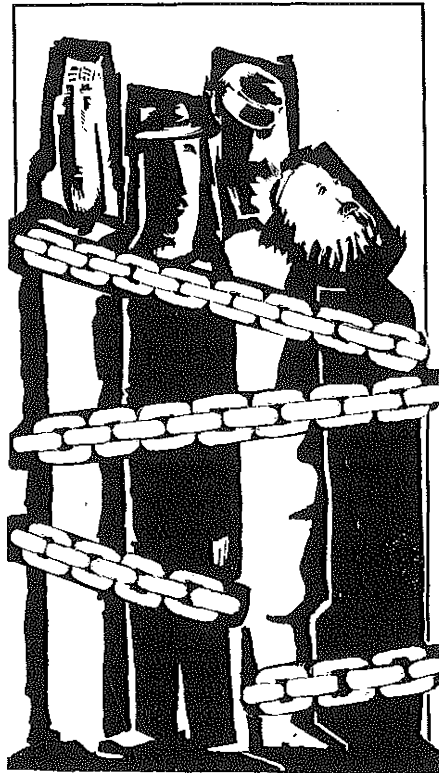
This is a question which any child could ask and one with which the finest minds of human society have grappled. Why do the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? We could get a clearer idea of how to look at the problem if we started by asking, what does "being rich" (or "being poor") mean? "Being rich" is ordinarily used to mean possessing much more wealth than is required to survive from day to day, whereas "being poor" means *not* possessing enough wealth for the same purpose. What is wealth? Wealth is anything human beings can make or find and can use to further the survival of their species; wealth is anything people find useful.

However, the bulk of society's wealth must be *produced*. And a certain *amount* of it must be produced to satisfy survival requirements (to meet human needs). Not only that, but the bulk of wealth production is not only a social but a community effort, which means that it usually takes a good many people working together (all at once or in sequence) to produce it. Once they have produced it, the question arises, how to distribute the product? If no special rules are in effect, the way a community distributes the wealth it has produced is to *share* it—even with individuals living in some other community.

When people share the products of their labor with each other, it is fairly obvious that they can be neither rich nor poor. Thus, the immediate answer to the first question is that we have the poor (and the rich) always with us because special rules have been adopted for distributing the wealth that we all produce as members of society. (Yes, these are bad rules.) And what *are* these special rules?

### Two types of "special rules"

They can be grouped in two categories: 1) individuals may withhold the wealth they cause to be produced from consumption by the community; and 2) individuals may deny other individuals access to the things they need to stay alive. The first set of special rules, if observed by enough people, has the effect of converting society into a marketplace, in which strangers approach each other and exchange their goods *provided* what they exchange is equivalent. (The goods are called commodities.)



The second set of special rules represents a consolidation of the first; a society composed of mutual strangers (each one responsible for marketing their own commodities) becomes indifferent to whether each of its members lives or dies. Consequently, it becomes acceptable for the more successful commodity owners to bargain not only over goods and services with the less successful but also to bargain with them for their *lives*. (This commonly goes by the name of "power.")

Once there get to be enough commodity owners in the marketplace of society, ceaseless struggles for power ensue. And once the Pandora's box of power has been opened, it is impossible to set a limit to how much power individuals can have. The marketplace becomes the only limit.

.....

Capital is a concentration of commodity wealth which affords its possessor the power of life and death, directly or indirectly, over those who lack it. Today's capitalist class is a class of absolute monarchs, each with his or her—mostly his—kingdom set up over some variable number of subjects who all grovel at their feet for the privilege of getting enough food to eat, clothes to wear and

shelter. This privilege is by no means always granted. We call this condition "being employed," "having a job" or a number of other things.

To be without employment in today's world is risky indeed. An employee or worker has only one commodity to offer in the marketplace: an ability to do work. An employer has the absolute right to distribute the privilege of survival to individual workers based on a commonly accepted estimate of how much it cost to shape or develop this working ability (or labor power). Unemployment is a state of existence (growing out of the special rules mentioned above) located somewhere between life and death—and not infrequently, it is closer to the latter.

Of all the workers there are, only a portion (possibly a very large portion, even a majority) actually concern themselves with producing wealth for their masters. Under capitalism, it is these workers whose privileges of survival determine the standard for the rest. Survival privileges go by the name of "wages" or "salaries," and each wage or salary is pegged to the "basket" of commodities (goods and services) required by different tiers of workers to continue being employed.

The power of life and death is transferred up the chain of command on a daily basis through the mobilization of the workers' various abilities to do work; this transfer of power is measured with a brutal but grandiose simplicity as the wealth that is left over after subtracting the workers' living requirements from the product of their labor. This excess amount of wealth is called profit, and anyone who produces it—or transfers it laterally to another lord and master—is "exploited."

### Profit, wages and income

The concentration of wealth in commodity form is what we know as "income." Profit is the source of income of the rich, whether they receive the transfer directly through production or indirectly through their competitive power struggles in the marketplace with the employers of productive wage labor. Wages (salaries) are the source of income of the poor.

Although income is really only an exchange of commodities (labor power for other survival goods), the spokesmen for the rich and powerful prefer to dress it up in the beautiful gown of money when they talk about it. Thus, both wages and profits are usually described in terms of the prices of goods and services, as though money had a life of its own.

One of money's interesting paradoxes is that if there is *too much* of it around, the prices of goods and services all go up. How do we know when there is too much money? When the total amount circulating exceeds

**Continued on next page**

the amount required for the exchange of goods and services. Since you need something to exchange for something else, if you have no money you can expect nothing for it. And so it happens that we certainly will continue having the poor with us, because their problem is precisely that they are unable to obtain the money they need to access these goods and services.

Under capitalism, the majority of the world's population lives in poverty, and (of course) as this population of wage slaves increases, so does the total poverty. No one can take pity on them and flood the market with spending money, because that would only drive price levels up, leaving them as poor as or poorer than before.

.....  
Another name for community sharing of wealth without power is communism; or if you like, socialism or common ownership of the means of production. It is moneyless. It is done on a worldwide basis. There are no special rules for producing and distributing wealth; there is only one general rule (the primitive one)—each person contributes (produces wealth or does something useful) according to their abilities; and each person receives (consumes wealth) according to their needs.

Everyone is unemployed, and no one can become an employer. No one can get rich, because everyone is wealthy. Everyone works for nothing, and no one lacks for necessities. How do we get back to the garden? Like losing weight, it starts with our thought processes: if enough people get together and decide to make it happen, the whole immense superstructure of exploitation will simply vanish like smoke. In that sense, the power of capital over society is the power of an illusion. **[EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was inspired by a suggestion from Comrade Len Fenton; and some of the material in the box was contributed by Comrade W.L.]**

## Wages, Profits and the "Income Gap"

After some decline in the late 1960s, poverty is as high today as it was before Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty began.

In 1960, black men earned about 31 per cent as much as whites, but by 1986 this ratio had increased to 73 per cent, according to Professor Haveman [director of the University of Wisconsin's La Follett Institute of Public Affairs].

Yet by other measures, the income gap has expanded in the last decade, in a recent report, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan research group, found that the median family income of blacks declined in the last decade from 59 per cent of that of whites to 56 per cent.

The Center estimated that female-headed black families had an average income of only \$9,710 in 1987, compared with \$17,018 for white families headed by a woman.

In the mid-1960s, poverty among children was no worse than for the population as a whole; today, one child out of four is poor, and children are 50 per cent more likely to be living in poverty (defined by the Government as an income of \$11,204 or less for a family of four) than is the population as a whole.

—"Now, to Figure Why the Poor Get Poorer (Poverty Strikes the Children Hardest)," Leonard Silk, *New York Times*, 12/18/88.

...the income gap between the richest and the poorest families in this country is greater today than at any time since the federal government began keeping statistics. One of the most troubling revelations is that the share of total personal income received by the most affluent one-fifth of all households rose to 46.1 per cent in 1986 from 43.3 per cent in 1970. At the same time, the share obtained by the poorest one-fifth declined to 3.8 per cent from 4.1 per cent in 1970. In that same period the middle class watched its own share dip to 50.1 per cent of total personal income in 1986 from 52.6 per cent, reports the US Census Bureau.

Since 1975, unions have lost four million members. Between 1981 and 1986, half of all unionized workers were forced to take wage cuts, accept two-tiered pay agreements, and/or make employee-benefit concessions. In the long term, the share of union workers in the non-farm workforce fell from 30.2 per cent in 1955 to 15.9 per cent in 1986.

Whether we want it done or not, our sights ARE being lowered for us. The remnants of the blue-collar class now form the "new collar" workers, an emerging lower middle class whose expectations and earnings have been eroded in the last 15 years.

—"The End of the American Dream?" Mark L. Goldstein, *Industry Week*, 4/4/88.

Percentage of productive hours worked by women: .....	47
Percentage of world's wages earned by women: .....	10
Percentage of world's property owned by women: .....	1
Percentage, in 1976, of the nation's wealth owned by America's richest 1%: .....	19.2
In 1988: .....	36
Teacher's monthly salary in Bolivia after federal spending was frozen to help pay off foreign debt: .....	\$40.00
Minimum cost to feed a family of four for a month in Bolivia: .....	\$140.00

—"The Economic Facts," *Greenpeace*, January/February 1989.

## SUICIDE MACHINE (cont.)

United States in the eight months after the arrival of the Chernobyl cloud." These deaths occurred "primarily through infectious diseases and a decline in the immune systems, particularly among older people, whose health simply could not withstand the weakening of their resistance due to the fallout."

Among the other consequences of the Chernobyl fallout mentioned by Wasserman are large drops in the birth rate in places the Chernobyl cloud has passed with its fallout of radioactive particles, and a heightened death rate ("a four-month-long radiation epidemic" in the U.S.). "Massive radioactive emissions from the Windscale weapons facility in the 1950s had caused heightened cancer rates in the nearby sheep-growing area," which was prudently concealed from the British public but shared with the CIA. ["Chernobyl's American Fallout"] While Sternglass' conclusions were (predictably) disputed by the nuclear establishment, the evidence—writes Wasserman—"would tend to point the other way."

• **NUCLEAR WINTER.** Science has offered us the insight that the aftermath of a global thermonuclear war (or an accidentally triggered warlike process) would carpet earth's atmosphere with

radioactive soot and ashes that not only would keep raining down on the surface of the planet, but would also prevent sunlight from entering the biosphere for several weeks. Temperatures would plunge to freezing or below, making water difficult or impossible to obtain anywhere; few or no buildings would remain standing in most regions of the (formerly) developed world. Providing heat would also be precluded, and the survivors would in any case be either dying of radiation poisoning or unable safely to attempt communicating with each other. The entire infrastructure of the capitalist system would be floating at random in the atmosphere in the form of deadly radioactive particles. At the other end of the short nuclear winter, the only life forms remaining might be cockroaches, bacteria and anything else capable of adapting to such extremes of cold.

...  
Still think capitalism is the best system "we" have been able to come up with so far? It may not be for much longer. All of these exotic, in some cases terrifying, problems stem from one source: the production of wealth based solely on the criterion of profit. The profit motive is the engine driving the insatiable expansion of markets regardless of consequence. In the absence of its mind-polluting effects, human society could at last settle down to a real symbiotic unity with the

rest of nature; people could achieve the freedom to manage the satisfaction of their needs in harmony with the needs of other living things. Our developed mental powers would be able to focus on converting natural limits into a renewable abundance, once liberated from the dictatorship of the marketplace.

But it will never happen as long as we retain the rigid and unadaptable market system as our basis for producing wealth. Capital is a source of mental corruption and has no sense of reality; it is only through opposition to capitalism's normal effects that human intelligence has succeeded in regaining that sense. Let us get in touch with our instincts and get out of the system.

— A. R.

1. Environment, 25(10):55-60, 1983. Reprinted in *Global Ecology*, edited by Charles H. Southwick, Sinauer Associates Inc., Sunderland (Massachusetts), 1985.
2. "A Million Species Are Endangered," an article by P. Schabecoff in the *New York Times*, 11/22/81.
3. "Here comes the sun...and it's not all right," Dick Russell, *In These Times*, April 5-11, 1989.
4. "Chernobyl's American Fallout," Harvey Wasserman, *Zeta Magazine*, June 1989.



## NEWS FROM THE NEW WORLD

*Imagine no possessions*

### IS SOCIALISM PRACTICAL?

IF YOU ARE READING THIS at all, you probably already realize that our present system of society needs some major changes to make it work. Chances are you are aware of hunger, homelessness, unemployment, threats to the environment, and so forth, and would like to find a way to eliminate these problems. Most of us would like to leave the world a little better than we found it, to leave our children an inheritance of a society a little kinder than the dog-eat-dog competition of American capitalism.

The trouble is, we have only so much energy. After working eight hours a day, five days a week, plus a few extra hours in the commute, there's not a whole lot of time left to spend on "world improvement". So the tendency is either to give up on it altogether, Yuppie-style, and focus on *self-improvement* (sometimes rationalizing that this is the first step in making the world better), or else to focus on some short-term objective that looks as though it will make a real difference—if not in changing the whole structure of society, then at least in changing some particularly troublesome aspect of it.

The reason most people who hear the socialist case do not respond by joining forces with the world socialist movement is that working for socialism just doesn't seem very practical. It doesn't appear to produce results. The World Socialist Party has been at it since 1916, and capitalism is still going strong. So, from a practical standpoint, isn't it a waste of time to put what little energy we have left, after earning a

living, into "an impossible dream"? But—

### IS CAPITALISM PRACTICAL?

There are a lot of things that can never be accomplished within the framework of society as it is presently constituted.

For example, under capitalism it will never be "practical" to clean up the environment. To do so would be very difficult to finance, and would not make a profit for anyone. Money and profits are the prime motives of accomplishment in capitalist society.

As this article is being written (April, 1989), an Alaskan oil spill is killing wildlife and wreaking havoc on the ocean as a habitat, while the United States government and Exxon argue about who's going to pay for the clean-up. Media coverage is focusing on the guilt of individuals in causing the spill, rather than on the profit orientation of an economy willing to take the known risk in the first place. Is this practical? Is it practical to take chances with the only planet we have?

In a socialist society, money would be no object. (In fact, money would not exist at all.) The motive for accomplishing things would not be money and profits, but rather the satisfaction of human wants and needs. Clearly, preserving a healthy environment is an overwhelmingly important need we all have in common, one which in a sane society would take precedence over almost everything else. So it would be eminently "practical" in socialism to keep the oceans safe for marine life, whereas it obviously is not today. Only by eliminating profit as a motive and money as a means of exchange can we solve the problems of our polluted environment.

It is important to understand that money is no longer socially necessary. There is no need for a medium of exchange in a world like ours of the 1980's, where the technology to produce abundance already exists. Money is only useful when there is a need to limit access to things because of scarcity. The contribution of capitalism is that it has solved enough problems of production so that scarcity no longer has to exist. We live in a world of potential abundance, even though that potential cannot be realized without eliminating the profit motive. The reason things are scarce today is not that we working

people can't produce enough. It's that if things became too abundantly available, they could no longer be sold for enough for anyone to make a profit—and, after all, profits are what capitalism is all about. That's why Exxon and others are willing to take such risks. (It's also why farmers are paid *not* to produce food, in spite of the fact that there are hungry people in our country.)

### MONEY vs FREE ACCESS

The irony is that, with society set up so that limiting access is what keeps things going, the system itself inevitably resists eliminating the ways by which it limits access—namely, the wages system and money to buy things.

Capitalism needs money to limit access to goods and services. It tends to make everything into a commodity, something that can be bought and sold. One of the main characteristics of our society is that *access to what we need is kept limited*, so that a few people will be able to make a profit.

The kind of thinking that sees tuna fish as a commodity is not likely to preserve the oceans as an environment for dolphins to play in.

Nor is the system that has transformed our energy into a commodity called labor power likely to preserve the earth as an environment for our grandchildren to play in.

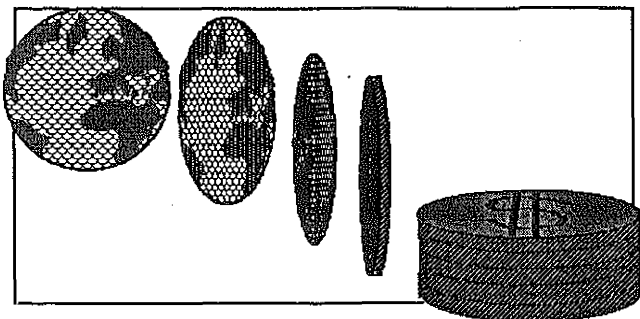
But once money is no object, many "impractical dreams" become child's play. Keeping our waters clean is not technologically impossible, or even difficult; it's just expensive. The hardest task of most environmental programs is to obtain funding.

What I would like to suggest here is that it's easier in the long run to eliminate the *need* for funding, than to fight the losing battle of trying to find it for each individual situation that demands change. Given the limited amount of energy any of us has left at the end of a day of capitalism (as noted above), the most efficient and significant way to spend that energy is on making a real revolution in society.

We act in our own self-interest, not by finding ways to get more money, but by eliminating the basis for money—and thereby creating a society of free access. Then, anything we want to do will be within our power and practical.

—Karla Ellenbogen

11/summer 1989



From Twin Oaks

# Capitalism vs. Community

Twin Oaks (near Louisa, Virginia) is one of the more successful communes to emerge out of the 60s and survive into the 80s. In the *Whole Earth Review* for Summer 1986, Kathleen Kinkade ("Kat")—the only founding member of the commune continuing to live there—wrote an article ("A commune that works, so far") which cautiously evaluated the pros and the cons of TO's approach to communal living. A WSP member ("Aaron") who also belongs to the Twin Oaks commune took issue with a number of statements she made in her article and initiated a written exchange of ideas among the other Twin Oakers on the subject—a paper entitled, "Is Twin Oaks Really Communal?" What follows is a series of ideas excerpted from that paper arranged in the form of a roundtable discussion; participants include Aaron, Brenda, Kai and Ross, with some help from Allen and Bob (whose contributions are not recorded here—and many others also shared their ideas). Kat speaks from her 1986 article; Aaron's remarks are in italics.

## A. Security: The Satisfaction of Needs

**Kat:** Our social security is total, cradle to grave.

**Aaron:** *Provided the community remains solvent and in existence for the length of each member's life should they remain. If the community is ever dissolved, each member gets \$2,000 upon the dissolution of the property and the bulk of what remains goes back into the federation. That small amount is hardly worthy compensation for a lifetime of wealth production here. It's certainly not enough to enable one to start over again in life, particularly if one is elderly. I would hardly call that cradle to grave social security.*

*"Why do people leave?" For many reasons. One of which...is because people realize that they are making an enormous investment of their lives in something which will yield no return if they don't remain locked into it for their lifetime or if it should fail along the way. If you want to point out the worst case scenarios as examples, you may do so. However, most people (if you look at the average) do far better for themselves and gain better financial security (and that's a relative condition within capitalism, granted) than they do by investing their energies here.*

**[Speaking to Bob]:** Most of us are single and without depend-

*ents and are able to start over on scratch fairly well, but .... several former members, particularly those with children to support or with few employable skills, have had a very rough time of it and have had to enter public assistance programs in order to make ends meet. How is it that you believe that the community really takes care of its inhabitants when this is so? I'm sure that you must have some concerns that later in your life, perhaps when you're a man in his sixties or seventies, you may decide that you wish to live elsewhere besides T.O. but of course will have no financial means to make that possible.*

## B. Ownership

**Kat:** Twin Oaks' day-to-day labor demands aren't too bad these days, because we have fewer than 20 children, so the people who aren't bringing in money can be doing the other necessary tasks. Besides, the sales efforts are behind us now. At this point, we can afford to keep only a third of our labor force in moneymaking activities. I don't by any means think Twin Oaks is a model to follow for income production. We did the best we could, and we are economically secure enough, but there are probably better ways for other groups. What we did right, though, was to resist the impulse to try to live off the land (penicillin doesn't grow on trees; neither does gasoline) and faced the necessity of making money in the nation's marketplace. Another feasible way is to work at jobs in cities (we did that for a few years as a stopgap, and we sure don't recommend it if there is any alternative.)

We maintained a communal economy. The essence of the benefit of pooled resources is that once you have spent what you need to for the basic maintenance of the group, what you have left over is a big enough lump of money to do something significant with. If you divide up the money and distribute it to the workers, each worker's ambitions are limited by the small amount of the resources. In such an economy there are lots of tape players and bicycles. But in a communal economy, the "surplus" money pile is big enough for something that serves the whole community. Such a community has sidewalks and sewage treatment. Eventually it gets tape players and bicycles, too, but not until the group feels that it has luxury money. One might think it could work just as well the other way—first buying the individual luxuries, then taxing for the big-ticket items. One reason it doesn't is that when members leave, they can take their small purchases with them, but the sidewalks stay put.

We held the line on consumption. Twin Oaks' early leaders were very stingy with consumer goodies. Most of the surplus cash, when we had any, went into buildings, tools, and business investment. That same conservatism, though loosening somewhat in recent years, is still basic to our financial thinking. We produce more than we consume, and we put large chunks of the surplus production into permanent improvements. If we didn't have a common purse, we wouldn't be able to do that, because there wouldn't be enough cash to do it with. The lack of basic facilities, like utilities and public buildings, would in turn discourage serious communards from choosing our way of life.

**Aaron:** *Of greater importance than tape players and bicycles is the question of larger personal assets and who really owns the wealth of Twin Oaks, a question which is usually brushed aside by most of us here. Both Twin Oaks' capital assets—money in the bank and other investments—and fixed assets—sidewalks, sewage treatment plant as Kat mentions, buildings, vehicles, etc are not actually owned by the commune's inhabitants, but rather by Twin Oaks as an institutional corporate trust. Despite Kat's glowing description*

of Twin Oaks (which is more or less accurate in terms of its description of Twin Oaks' social amenities) let us not be mistaken, this is not socialism, it's a cooperative financial arrangement within capitalism. One must ask, however, what are we in cooperation to achieve? After having produced surplus value (profit) for the community for one, twenty, or fifty years, if one then decides to leave they walk away with thirty-five dollars per month allowance in savings plus, at best, an extra one hundred dollars thrown in. Not much in personal assets to show for after putting in all that work. This sort of arrangement in the work place of society at large would be a capitalist's dream come true!

**Brenda:** We have achieved the Marxist dream—at T.O. the workers own the means of production, and they have control over the conditions of their work.

**Ross:** Twin Oaks has accomplished a necessary trade-off that enables us to live our special lifestyle within US capitalist society. No, we're not socialist or completely communal, because we need to earn money and there is no more efficient way to make money than by capitalist organization (accounting system)—that is the one very short-term job capitalism does too well, at the expense of human needs and life-support systems. We do operate our businesses for profit, but we distribute most of it to each other in social services and allowance—equally, yet keeping a substantial portion in reserve for appropriate investment. This means that, as Aaron suggests, Twin Oaks, as an institution, does not share out 100 percent of its assets and therefore is not really "owned" by the members. Ideally we should be able to increase allowances and leaving funds to equal our total output of value in profits. But if we did, we'd be bankrupt in a short time, and people would have a further incentive to leave, in fact a reward for leaving. Because we operate profit-making businesses we must keep a reserve of "working capital" or the businesses will fail. We must keep a reserve in appropriate investments to insure our financial survival in the volatile, boom-and-bust world of business. To do otherwise would, in my opinion, encourage members to "take their money and run" before the financial roof fell in. If the United States were a socialist economy there might be no boom-and-bust syndrome and everyone could relax and share everything without fear of bankruptcy and seizure of land and buildings. But the United States is what it is, and

we have little choice but to struggle for financial survival within that context.

**Aaron [speaking to Bob]:** In a property-based society, such as the bulk of the globe is, all property is owned in some way or another. In an entity such as Twin Oaks property can be owned in essentially two ways. Either all of the assets can be owned by the institution as a corporate trust, or individuals who inhabit it can own shares which are issued. At Twin Oaks it is of course the former which we find and the members which make up this entity do not own it despite the fact that they run it.

Towards the end of your comments you state: "Having the use of assets without owning them (in the sense of being responsible for them as an individual) is the way the very well-to-do live." This simply is not so, and if you'd think about it for a moment you'd realize this. Although some capitalists choose to hold management positions in the corporations to which they own stock, management positions are not where they derive their wealth. They derive their wealth and indeed their power over the company and the economy at large through large numbers of shares which they do own and which pay them enormous dividends. Most of the truly wealthy in fact don't work at management but in fact hire professional executives to manage their wealth for them.

The so-called "Socialist or Communist Nations" .... which are misrepresented as socialist are in fact economically state-capitalist—in other words, wealth is owned by the state rather than by individuals as in the West (or, by society in common)—much like Twin Oaks is in miniature, and politically these places are governed by brutal dictatorships.

### C. Wealth: Market vs. Community

**Kat:** One major way that Twin Oaks has not succeeded is that we have not figured out a way to keep the same people here for their whole lives.

**Aaron:** I would suggest that a major contributing reason for this is that members in the main show up here young and full of idealism, after some time—perhaps several years here—figure out the above which I have described, realize that it is too great a gamble/rip off despite Twin Oaks' social advantages, and thus leave so that they may get on with their lives and perhaps greater financial security.

Twin Oaks thus remains a school of living for predominantly young people to spend a few years of their lives at, and a home to a smaller number who remain ideal-

istically committed and do not realize the above, or who do but continue to choose to rationalize it from their thoughts so that they can continue to live here with some peace of mind.

**Kat:** True, we have to fill out and turn in a labor credit sheet that tells what work we did each week. But in exchange for that five-minute-a-day job, we have flexibility in our work schedules unmatched by any

**Continued on p. 14**

## ON SECOND THOUGHT

From the Western Socialist

Gabriel Kolko tells us that the Bureau of Labor Statistics family budgets for cities are based upon the former studies made by the WPA in 1935 and a subsequent National Resources Committee investigation. The WPA survey of 59 cities included in their "decency" standard a four- or five-room house or apartment with private toilet facilities in fair repair, gas, electricity, a small radio, a daily paper, a movie once a week, minimum medical care, clothing and furniture, no car, an adequate minimum cost diet and slight incidentals. There were no savings except for a small insurance policy. To maintain this level in 1935 required \$1261. To maintain the "minimum decency" standard set by the BLS on the other hand required an average of \$1367 in 1941; in 1947 an average of \$3300; in 1950 an average of \$3717; and in 1951 an average of \$4166. How much more would it be in 1957!

Now the really interesting disclosures that are brought out in his Tables 7 and 8 should once and for all silence those effusive propagandists of a mythical American working-class prosperity. Table 7 demonstrates that in 1935-36 there was a total of 48.8 per cent of "National Consumer Units" earning less than the WPA maintenance standard, a total of 28 per cent earning less than the WPA "emergency level." But that was back in 1935 and 1936. Ah yes! but table 8 sets forth the amazing (to anyone who wants to be satisfied with fancies rather than facts) figures that show a total of 48.6 per cent of "national consumer units" earning less than the BLS maintenance level in 1947 and a total of 51.3 per cent below the standard in 1950. Furthermore, there was a total in 1947 of 30.3 per cent of these "consumer units" living below the BLS "emergency" level and in 1950 the figure was 32 per cent. In other words there is a larger percentage of workers "in the soup" today than there were in 1935 and 1936.

—HARMO, "No Place to Go,"  
March-April 1957.

lifestyle I've ever heard of...in exchange for these nuisances, we are able to make multiple use of our vehicles and living spaces and get a lot of amenities on an income which technically registers at \$6,800 a year each.

**Kai:** We say Twin Oaks "works." Economically that's true. But if we're so wonderful, how come all but a handful of the people who have come here over the past 20 years have gone back "out there"? Maybe if we as a group were to begin to put more time/energy/resources into meeting individual needs, we would get smaller and have \$ and luxuries. But maybe the people who stayed would stay for forty years instead of four. I think that is something we as a community need to recognize and come to a decision on. Do we want to be an institution or a family? Size and numbers, or lifetime commitments?

Are we really communal? Depends on how you define it. We use things communally, that's for sure. But we don't own things communally—Twin Oaks Inc. does. And we're not shareholders in Twin Oaks the corporation, we're employees of it. We don't decide things communally—we have an entire bureaucracy to handle that end of things. (Although I guess the argument could be made that we communally decided to not decide things communally. But since only one of the persons here when that decision was made is still here, feels more like we inherited the decision instead of made it.) Personally I have to agree with Aaron's analysis—"T.O. is a cooperative financial arrangement within capitalism." The very moves we've made to ensure the survival of Twin Oaks as an institution have progressively made us less and less financially communal. So while we are definitely an intentional community, we may be a commune, I don't think we are "communal." (Aren't semantics wonderful?)

**Aaron:** I find myself in the rather odious position of having to give advice on what one could or should do in order to survive in life under capitalism...[but] I'm more interested in getting beyond this mess to a world of genuine communal possibilities. We should all be working toward that socialist future, yet in the meantime we must recognize the existing reality of the nuts and bolts of the capitalist economy and do what we can for ourselves and our dependents in order to survive and hopefully remain true to our principles.

**Ross:** If Twin Oaks' money was divided into shares owned by the membership, the reality of turnover would bankrupt us in

a couple of years. Twin Oaks takes good care of its members. You don't dispute that. We can do that because we've survived for 20 years. We cannot possibly take good care of ex-members. You are comparing Twin Oaks unfavorably to the capital assets of corporate society, as if we are somehow required to emulate and surpass the capitalist madhouse we moved here to get away from....I don't envy any of them [the ex-members], regardless of whatever yearly income they may have struggled for. They pay it right out again in rent and mortgages, high prices and taxes, plus the gross distortions of life they have to live with in corporate America. Money is not the measure. Lifestyle is.

**Kai:** I think if we started listening to the reasons people leave, tried to do something about it, gave people here more of a feeling of empowerment, the discontent that causes turnover would be on the road to being dealt with.

**Ross:** Any community that is self-sufficient could survive economically because it would be independent of the market forces, the boom-and-bust syndrome, the rip-off nature of capitalist society. If a community grew 95 percent of its own food and supplied its own electricity, heated itself in winter with its own wood, etc., etc.—such a community could feed itself during "hard times." [Sic] To be able to build Twin Oaks into the fairly comfortable community it is, earning a lot of money was unavoidable....Do we have to go on earning more and more money to continue being successful? I think that would entrap us into the mainstream system of always having to expand so as not to collapse.

**Aaron:** There is no escape [from the "capitalist madhouse"]. Perhaps someday we'll consign it to the scrap heap of history but for now T.O. is very much a part of this society. T.O. is a corporation, and as I've pointed out, it provides even less of a return to the workers who run it than do corporations which have to negotiate with workers organized into trade unions. It can get away with it because its membership mistakenly believes that because they live here and because they can see no visible owner, then they must be the owners.

If a community is composed of the lives of the people who make it up, then in a sense for the overwhelming majority of people who have lived here over the years Twin Oaks did not last, and its members overall did not prosper for their participation in it....We who live here now enjoy the fruits of profit created by all those who came before

us just as a different group of new people will inherit the profits of those of us who labor here now.

## D. Community

**Kat:** Twin Oaks really is fully communal...

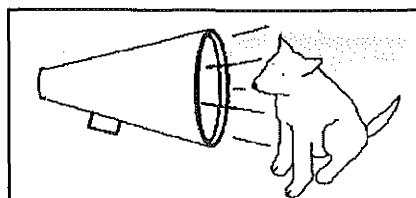
**Aaron:** Indeed it is not. In short, Twin Oaks is not owned by the people who inhabit it. They live here for a time, produce wealth for the community, consume a small portion of the wealth they've produced, and in time usually leave, leaving within the community the bulk of the profits—capital, inventory of commodities, fixed assets—which they produced during their time here.

[Speaking to Bob:] You state, "What would make me feel insecure would be an organization where ex-members could walk off with our assets." How quickly we the group becomes them those ex-members as soon as one decides to leave. What sort of partnership does that make this? Let's look at some examples: Gerri lived here for 16 years. She arrived as a 19 year-old college student and left, a woman in her mid-thirties...Gerri and Will [her husband], as with all others who have lived and worked here for any length of time were cheated out of their investment of years of labor because neither they nor any of us are partners in this enterprise. This is the lot of workers in all jobs to varying degrees, but the level of exploitation by this institution of the people who run it is such that to believe it is communal is at best amusing and at worst foolhardy indeed.

[Speaking to Allen:] ...Twin Oaks is not a "socialist or communal lifestyle." Socialism means a worldwide system of common ownership and democratic control of the world's resources as a whole. It would mean a worldwide system of society just as capitalism currently is and not simply a few examples of people who are quite rightly repulsed by the inhuman conditions of the competitive society in which we live and have embarked on sincere efforts to interact in ways which are more cooperative than that which society as it is constituted currently allows.

**EDITOR'S COMMENTS:** "In general," says Alan Drengson in an article entitled "Nature, Community and Self" (Communities, No. 75, Summer 1988), "if a society provides inadequate forms of community to encourage and aid in the development of mature, integrated persons, it generates a whole series of problems which it then tries to solve by means of greater external

**Continued on p. 17**



## YOU SAID IT

### **Our Masters' Voice WHEN IN BUSINESS, DO AS THE BUSINESSMEN DO....**

*Perestroika* is beginning to look like big bucks to the Masters of the Permanent War Economy in the traditional capitalist countries. This is of course no secret to anyone. What raises one's eyebrows is the disarming candor with which the business press views the process. According to *Business Magazine* (Bay State edition), May 1988,

The staunchest anti-capitalist country in the world—the Soviet Union—could just hold the key to future growth for your company.

Subscribers to the Evil Empire theory are about to execute (if we may believe one Alexander Russinov, a consultant who emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States in the 70s) an ideological zigzag that would excite the envy of Joseph Stalin himself. In Russinov's words,

Soviet partners are considered excellent partners. The Irving Trust Company and Chase Manhattan Bank have been doing business with Russia for 70 years.

(That's 1918, in case you can't count.) Endowed (by history if not by nature) with an "unbelievably huge market," Leninist Russia, you will recall, for many decades smugly claimed that the Communist Party was the Vanguard of the Proletariat and as such was entitled to act as the guide of the working class in leading it through the protracted transition period to "the higher stage of communism." Russinov is probably blissfully unaware of this, despite his having lived there most of his life; in a charmingly businesslike way, his partner, Veronika Novodvorsky, gets directly to the point:

Korea and Taiwan are part of the free market economy, and there is no assurance that their low labor costs will remain so. In fact, history has shown a doubling of costs in such free market economies every 25 years—that could not happen in Russia with its state run economy.

What we get from this is that an exploiting class of capitalists will cheerfully resort to any pretext, no matter how ideologically repugnant, to keep workers from succumbing to the "trade union mentality," which

instigates them to organize and so cut into the rate of profit. Leninist state capitalism has proved to be no exception.

## **A LABOUR OF LOVE OF VOTES**

Should we be shocked to discover that everything which negotiates with capital sooner or later becomes capitalist? Such is the (long-predicted) fate of Britain's Labour Party:

Only a few days after Labor bemoaned the 10th anniversary of Mrs. Thatcher's accession, the party's national executive met to begin a segue back toward the center. It rejected a series of hard-left ideas, a process that reached an extraordinary epiphany when party leader Neil Kinnock announced he was abandoning Labor's support for unilateral disarmament. (*The Wall Street Journal*, 5/1/89)

The Labour Party was always Marx's Bad Boy anyhow; "the despair of socialists," as the Social Democrats of Europe used to say. Now it has figured out that all that talk about expropriating the capitalist class was, ahem, undisciplined:

Mr. Kinnock is quoted as saying that capitalism is "the system we live in, and we've got to make it work more efficiently, more fairly and more successfully." (*TWSJ*, 5/1/89)

But *The Wall Street Journal's* editorial writer wants us to know there is a trend going on here. Lest there be any doubt about in our minds, we are informed that another Labor Party has experienced the same change of heart—

Such talk echoes the kinds of things we heard in a recent conversation with the leader of Israel's Labor Party, Shimon Peres, at his office in the Finance Ministry, which he heads in Israel's coalition government. "If we want to distribute money like socialists," Mr. Peres told us, "we have to make money like capitalists." The economy, he said, is international, and the free market in the world decides economies in every country." There are, he said, "rules to the game, and you cannot turn your back on it."

If we overlook the fact that socialists don't distribute money (they abolish the need for it), having to "make money like capitalists" means paying workers (exploiting them), usually as little as you can get away with (exploiting them ruthlessly) and finding it good when profits are up (which normally means wages are down). People who have attained this frame of mind are not very likely to give money away ("distribute money like socialists"); but you can trust them to mean what they say about making it like capitalists.

As to "rules," who (to paraphrase the old Roman aphorism) shall prosecute

Capital? The rules followed by capital are easy to learn: (1) no ticket, no laundry; and (2) no profit, no production. Those who are busy making money like capitalists (regardless of whether they intend later to distribute it like socialists) have no trouble following these rules. The rules also don't forbid selling weapons to be used against workers in other countries\* or going out partying with worker-mutilating dictators—who haven't got the least intention of ever "distributing money like socialists" (and who also don't give a damn whether the system works more fairly, so long as it works successfully at squeezing efficiency out of exploited workers). Nor do the rules frown on playing at thermonuclear chicken with "kill ratios" 30 to 40 times in excess of what would be needed to wipe out every worker on the face of the earth. Nor do they stick at causing the destruction of our one and only environment by chemical and other means.

But rules are rules, and all of the above is anyhow just a game (if you make money like a capitalist). Marx quotes a pamphleteer (T.J.—or P.J.?—Dunning) who had some interesting things to say about the "rules of the game":

Capital eschews no profit, or very small profit, just as Nature was formerly said to abhor a vacuum. With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 per cent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 per cent certain will produce eagerness; 50 per cent, positive audacity; 100 per cent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 per cent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged. If turbulence and strife will bring a profit, it will freely encourage both. (Capital, Vol. 1, Ch XXXI.)

The only reason capitalism is (still) the system we live in is that we haven't decided (yet) to live in another one; i.e., it must be tolerable, if not acceptable, because otherwise we wouldn't have to admit we were stuck with it. Of course, "we" happen to be making money like capitalists, that is, off the labor of someone else to whom "we" pay a wage—rather than (for example) dying slowly of malnutrition or running out of firewood and thus contributing to a global deforestation trend. The (larger) question is, do the rest of us really want to continue living by rules like these?

—Ron Elbert

\* Israel, according to *NACLA Report on the Americas* (March/April 1987) was the "only country that gave [the Guatemalan generals] military support in [their] battle against the guerrillas" (p 31).

# Socialist Principles: An Overview

## 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, proved the validity of this judgment. In our opinion, if you agree, generally, with the following statements, you are a socialist and belong with us.

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 administration of the affairs of man. 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 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 mankind 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 in Russia, China and in all of the other so-called socialist or communist countries is state capitalism. Goods and services, in those countries, as in avowedly capitalist lands, are 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." Ø

## SOCIALIST SCHOLARS CONFERENCE

Held at the City University of New York at the beginning of April (which this writer attended), it was impressive enough in terms of the range of subjects it covered, the number of persons attending it and the breadth of representation of the sponsors and participants. The closest thing to it I can think of (and which I have never been to) is an annual event in France sponsored by the Trotskyist *Lutte Ouvrière* (*Workers' Struggle*), in which everyone who's anyone on the left shows up.

It was, on the face of it, a welcome opportunity to discuss ideas and events in a relatively open atmosphere, though in practice, it frequently turned into a war of fixed positions between competing points of view. It also represented an occasion for networking (establishing contacts with other organizations) and generally a pretty good place to find source materials.

Organized by the CUNY Democratic Socialists' Club and centered nominally on the theme, "Two Centuries of Revolution: 1789-1989," the Conference was used regularly and methodically by the DSs to get in some Marx-bashing; I couldn't be sure how well attended those workshops were, since they were all the same dreary variations on the topic, "Isn't Marxism dead yet?" which did not help them to seem any more interesting.

Two panels which I did attend—one called "Is Capitalism Entering a New Stage?" sponsored by *Monthly Review*, featuring Paul Sweezy, Samir Amin and Beatrix Campbell, and the other on "Black Workers and Class Consciousness"—were at least on more provocative subjects. (Sweezy believes the answer to the question is "no": capitalism is locked on a course of continued stagnation.) The panel on class consciousness among black workers brought forth the usual round of analyses and ended by leaving the impression that black workers are neither more nor less class conscious than any other sectors of the working class in the United States—though racism and systematic underemployment can generate extra obstacles to socialist understanding for blacks.

Had we (the Boston group) made inquiries early enough, we could at least have had adequate time to decide whether or not we wanted to pay for and man a literature booth at the Conference. We should definitely set up a booth there next year; it would give some very good exposure to socialist ideas. If we can demonstrate expertise in some field, it is even possible we could sponsor a panel or workshop of our own at future conferences, assuming there is a show of interest in it from comrades.

—Ron Elbert

## Community (cont.)

controls in the form of laws and enforcement." But this only winds up increasing the need for social control. A society divided into wage-earners and capitalists is by its very nature authoritarian, because it depends on excluding rather than including its members. Given that capitalism, in other words, cannot satisfy the social needs of the world's people, there must be an alternative system that can. The discussion centers around four assertions made by Kat about how living on a commune like Twin Oaks addresses this problem.

The market system, Drengson points out, can never provide an adequate basis for a community of human beings: "The self develops in a wholesome way by learning to care for, and by being cared for by others. In a context that lacks community all relationships are formalized and contractual; people are together only because they are producers and consumers, rather than to cooperate and develop friendships." The market expresses people's social nature denuded of its natural medium, the community: "Community as an organizing concept stresses reciprocal and shared values, not just mechanical interactions." It is in this gap between the market as a form of distributing wealth and the commune as an effort to subvert it in various experimental ways that the need for replacing production for profit becomes evident; for any institution that accepts the terms of survival imposed by the market must sooner or later act as an agent for it, even against the interests of its own members.

Thus, while it is nice to think of capital-

## On the Brink (cont.)

diligently perform their tasks and live with docile tranquility on wages which are a fraction of the equivalent wages in developed countries.

- While the US share of international markets has been falling, and lapses in the race to gain a competitive edge in technology have made further inroads into the US position, corporations have steadily rolled back organized labor to a mere 15 percent of the workforce.

- Despite the shift to high-tech in the sphere of production, most new employment is now in the low-paid service sector.

These factors, operating together, have exerted a downward pressure on earnings, with a consequent faltering of working-class standards of living. As organized labor has reeled under capital's three-pronged onslaught, real wages have tended either to stagnate or to fall, even while the price of housing has catapulted upward. The result: a growing army of marginalized workers who find owning or renting a home problematic—if not utterly impossible. During the Reagan administration, subsidies to the working and non-working poor were sys-

ism as place you can get away from, its character as a system of wealth production makes it an all-pervasive system which we carry with us even in our most isolated moments. It has engulfed the whole world, and now only the world as a whole can replace it with a system that satisfies people's needs—needs as only people can experience them:

For a child at a certain age, and for some isolated communities, the community in its natural setting is the world. For us today, however, "world" means the planet Earth, not just our immediate locale. The root of the word "planet" means wanderer, and the root of Earth means ground. Thus we could say the Earth as community is our common ground. And to planetize the concept of community is to allow it to wander over the Earth (the ground) to become global. Thus...the planetization of the concept of community involves seeing the Earth as a whole community, that is, as a community of communities, our shared home and place in the galaxy. [Alan Drengson, "Nature, Community and Self"]

It takes more than a single local community existing at the margins of the capitalist system (or, as in the case of Twin Oaks, partially integrated into it) to approach this scale of living and working together. Even a multitude of isolated communities does not in itself make a system of production on a world scale. There is a world of problem-solving that lies in between. Unless the world as a whole is actually at the point of going beyond the market system, individual communities will unavoidably remain imprisoned within the marketplace. ♦

## All party events are open to the public

tematically gutted on the plea that capitalists needed "incentives" to invest. Where else to get it but from the pockets of the poor? A handy new doctrine invented in the late 70s (called "supply side economics") was deployed to prove that the needs of the poor were, in fact, considerably less pressing than the weak-minded Keynesians had led everyone to believe. This rationale was used to justify massive cuts in what has euphemistically been called "social welfare" spending (including federally funded low-income housing).

Oposing a thing, it has been said, is the best way to perpetuate it. Proposals to alleviate the antisocial effects of capital's tendency to undermine the very living standards which it has itself rendered possible only end up (when they are successful) expanding the scale of misery and suffering. Capital reflects all anger back on those who experience it; it can even turn a profit at the

## Under the Gun (cont.)

of production and consumption—the savagery of the repression keeps them too occupied with immediate survival.

The closest thing to a glimmer of insight that there are "broader problems" behind the burning questions was a statement by CCM's Leonardo Hidalgo: "We're the labor force that builds beautiful houses, but we don't get to live in those houses.... We produce El Salvador's wealth, but we don't have access to it." This is at least a healthy step in the right direction, but the country still lacks a movement to abolish production for profit. The basic issues of free access to necessary goods and services, common ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production, still remain under ice in tropical El Salvador.

—A.D.

1. *The Politics of Intervention: The United States in Central America*, edited by Roger Burbach and Patricia Flynn, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1984.

2. *Working Against Us (The American Institute for Free Labor Development [AIFLD] and the International Policy of the AFL-CIO)*, Robert Armstrong, Hank Frundt, Hobart Spalding and Sean Sweeney. (NACLA pamphlet, 1987)

3. Nominally the "foreign policy arm of the AFL-CIO, AIFLD currently receives some 95 per cent of its funding from government sources and sees the struggle of classes through capital-colored spectacles. (*Working Against Us*)

4. Joann Wypijewski, "El Salvador: Voices on the Winds of Fury," *Zeta Magazine*, April 1989. (Interview with two representatives of the Salvadoran student movement, Salomón Alfaro Estrada and Rene Hernández.)

5. "In Salvador Time Waits for No One," Rubén Zamora, *The Nation*, February 27, 1989.

6. *Ibid.*

7. "Organizing in the slums of San Salvador," Mike Prokosch, *Central America Reporter*, May 1989.

box office from anger and resentment against the profit system. Society has reached the point where people ought to realize that the only way to guarantee the satisfaction of their needs is to eliminate the requirement of having to pay for everything, both at work and at large. It is technically possible right now to produce all necessary goods and services for nothing and distribute them for nothing. If a majority of people were to act on that insight at the same time in a conscious, political way, the "housing question" would become defunct literally overnight.

—D. Anthony

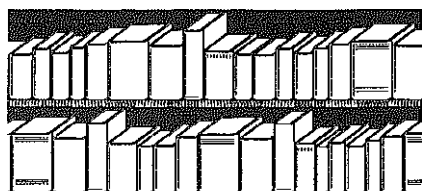
1. The academic was an associate professor named Phillip Clay. The study was financed in 1987.

2. *Street Magazine*, January 1988.

3. Dennis Gaffney, "MIT Tears Down Tent City," *The Progressive*, March 1988.

4. "The Homeless and their Children."

5. *The Wall Street Journal* 2/5/88.



## REVIEWED

### Books of interest to socialists

## WAGES NEED NOT BE A FACT OF LIFE

*World Without Wages (Money, Poverty and War!)*, Samuel Leight, A Series of Tucson Radio Broadcasts Presented for the World Socialist Party of the United States, Tucson, 1980.

We are living today in a world which is radically different from anything generations in past ages have been exposed to. The world's population at the present time, for the first time in history, has come to be largely made up of individuals who live by selling their ability to do work to someone else who pays them for being who they are and in the process gets them to work for him/her/them a while. While previous ruling classes have only *claimed* the power of life and death over those whom they exploited, the capitalist class has—more or less behind everyone's back—figured out how to make that power a reality. They have done it by making virtually the entire population of the globe dependent on them, directly or indirectly, for all the goods and services they need to stay alive.

The secret is simple: since wealth is simply the things people require to satisfy their needs, make the production of all wealth dependent on whether or not the users can pay for each item they must obtain. Wealth thus taking the

form of commodities turns wealth *production* into the production of commodities, which can be easily monopolized. Those who monopolize wealth production are called capitalists, and in one way or another they are all merely servants of an idea: capital.

Capital is wealth used to create more wealth with a view to profit. Karl Marx divided the capital used in the production process into two parts. One part comprised buildings, machinery and raw materials and is referred to as constant capital because its value undergoes no change in the production process but is transferred proportionately to the commodity being produced. The other part is called variable capital because it comprises labor power, which is the commodity owned by the workers and sold by them to the capitalist for wages. In the productive process this labor power has the *unique ability* to produce a greater value than that contained within itself. [*World Without Wages*, p 85, "Economics"]

The concept of value only becomes separate from that of wealth when an exploiting class can enforce an arbitrary reduction in the wealth consumption of those whom they exploit. Without exploitation, there could be no objective standard of need in effect; *with* exploitation, the need is determined by those who can deny food, clothing and shelter to others. This determination only takes on a semblance of objectivity when it has become very widespread. Once it becomes universal, it acquires the character of natural necessity.

### A compendium of ideas

*World Without Wages* is a handy all-around compendium of socialist thinking. Its style is unpretentious and unadorned; and its content will already be familiar to any convinced socialist. For this very reason, it serves as a good introduction to the case for socialism. Divided into 50 sections, the book discusses questions like war, racism, vio-

lence, pollution, social security, "overpopulation" and state capitalism in a short, readable magazine format. Although it was published in 1980, most of the material deals with crises that are ongoing or recurrent and so does not risk becoming quickly dated.

### Socialism is not complicated

Leight's analyses demonstrate, moreover, what socialists have always insisted on, which is that understanding socialism and replacing capitalism with it does not require the training of an expert or a specialist. Discussing "Wage Slavery," for example, he traces a few simple connections:

The slaves of old were owned outright—the modern "wage-slave" is paid by the hour, day, week or month at the price agreed upon for his labor power. And the "payment," in the form of wages, guarantees poverty, and is in stark contrast to the riches of the capitalist class, who in times of so-called peace exploit with finesse, while in times of war do not hesitate to call upon "their slaves" for the supreme sacrifice on their behalf, and for their properties. The size of the wage packet, always meagre and finely honed to marginal costs of living, conditions and pre-determines access to wealth; the lack of ownership rights ensures the enslavement. [p 219]

As a materialist, Leight rejects the numerous partial theories and short-range explanations that have been invented to prune away the undesirable aspects of capitalism while retaining its basic institutions intact (wages, prices and profit). The basic reason people are underfed, he says, is profit: "The corporations and businesses involved in food production and distribution exist, as in all other spheres of capitalist enterprise, to produce profits. The use values of the commodities concerned must be marketable in order to be profitable, but quantities and qualities are related to profits, and human benefits, while they are taken into consideration, are only

### Self-Management (cont.)

the concepts of alienation and exploitation overlap), but as "earning nonlabor income": "If a person or a group of persons are earning nonlabor income, they are exploiting others, and, insofar as this happens, social property is transformed into private property." [p 170] This has the effect of rendering the concept of exploitation essentially a moral-sentimental one rather than one which describes definite economic relations. This outcome is perhaps inevitable when one divorces income from exploitation in this manner, maintaining that income is not *per se* exploitative; the problem remains, though, that income is the device which implements

the otherwise abstract condition of exploitation.

This idea that workers can manage the production of surplus value in their own interest is perhaps typical of a capitalism run entirely by workers—even to the point of legally annulling private property. If it retains wages, prices, and profits, it still cannot be considered socialism.

—ROEL

1. The overview title of the article promises to draw "The Lesson of Solidarity," but the article's actual headline turns into "Fighting system from within," and the content is a thick-headed exercise in media stereotyping.

2. "Debate over workers' self-management" in *Poland: The fight for workers' democracy*, Zbigniew Kowalewski, Socialist Action pamphlet, San Francisco, 1988, p 32.

3. Kowalewski, p 32.

4. Kowalewski, p 35.

5. Hunnius, p 274.

6. See for example his article, "The Debate on Workers' Control," in the collection *Workers' Control: A Reader on Labor and Social Change*, edited by Gerry Hunnius, G. David Garson and John Case, Random House, New York, 1973.

7. "Origins of the Spanish Collectives," Tom Wetzell, *Ideas and Action*, No. 9, Spring 1988.

8. M.E. Sharpe, Inc., White Plains, 1976.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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evaluated as an adjunct to profits." [p  
222, "Health"]

The author touches only peripher-  
ally on how a socialist society might  
actually be organized, given the specula-  
tive nature of the subject. We can cer-  
tainly know the basic characteristics of  
socialism in contrast to those of capital-  
ism; but we cannot honestly say in ad-  
vance that we know what people are  
really capable of once their energies have  
been definitively released from the shack-  
les of the wages system. On the other  
hand, the whole idea of *eliminating* pro-  
duction for profit rests on having a fairly  
definite conception of why capitalist  
production is not suitable as a basis for  
human life, why it must be replaced—  
and by what. Leight makes this connec-  
tion with consistency and simplicity  
throughout *World Without Wages*, and it  
is this kind of "action" that, sooner or  
later, will prove to be instrumental in the  
spread of revolutionary socialist con-  
sciousness across the globe. Ø

# 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.
- That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.
- That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
- That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.
- That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
- That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and overthrow of plutocratic privilege.
- That as political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interest of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
- **THE 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:*

AUSTRIA: BUND DEMOKRATISCHER SOZIALISTEN Gussriegelstrasse 50, A-110 Vienna

SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA PO Box 4280 Station A, Victoria, BC V8X 3X8

SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN

SOCIALIST PARTY OF NEW ZEALAND PO Box 1929, Auckland, NI

WORLD SOCIALIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA PO Box 1440M, Melbourne, Victoria 3001

WORLD SOCIALIST PARTY (IRELAND) 41 Donegall Street, Belfast

**IF THEY COULD HAVE LOOKED** this far into the future, early Christian theologians would have had every right to designate the 21st century as the ideal location for Hell. Under the guiding wisdom of capitalist development, society has progressed in every major sphere to the brink of multiple catastrophes (some of which, taken in isolation, are compatible with continued "progress," but most of which are systemically fatal in their own right).

Politically, war has become peace and peace has become war, to the point where going to "peace" could annihilate or cripple civilization by a factor of thirty or forty; computerization has brought this option to within a time-frame of three minutes. Economically, capital is currently engaged in a number of hair-raising projects to undermine or destroy its own physical basis, the success of any one of which will inflict profound biological or climatological ravages on human society. Some of the more nerve-wracking items from capital's Catalogue of Depression:

- **DEFORESTATION.** "We are faced today," says Hugh H. Iltis in "Tropical Forests: What Will Be Their Fate?" "with the greatest biological calamity this world has ever known—the imminent decimation and extermination of the world's tropical biota [community of life forms]." This grim "realistic ecological picture," although it has its roots in attitudes and practices going back to the beginnings of capitalism, dates from only 1945. How did "we" accomplish this miracle in so short a time?

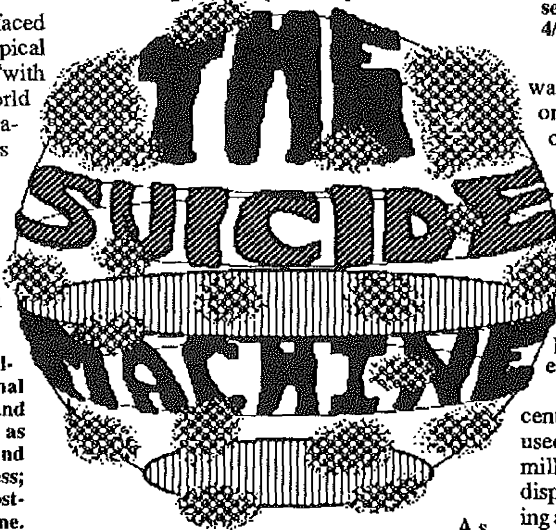
We now have DDT and 2,4,5-T; the all-powerful (and greedy) multinational corporations with their woodchippers and jungle smashers (one acre an hour, as advertised by Le Tourneau); the vast and hungry army of the poor and the landless; and the devastating, self-serving, post-World War II development syndrome. ["Tropical Forests"]

Hugh Iltis is not a hate-preaching terrorist (according to the mass media stereotype); he is professor of botany and director of the herbarium at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin. The assembled data are simply that horrendous. He further quotes E.O. Wilson as saying that such a massive loss of genetic diversity would be worse than "energy depletion, economic collapse, limited nuclear war or conquest by a totalitarian government....[It] will take millions of years to correct....the loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats." The genetic implications of capital's profit-orgy in the rain forests are heavy indeed for future generations: "Life will lose forever much of its capability for continued evolution," according to Prof. Iltis.

- **THE GREENHOUSE EFFECT.** Deforestation on a global scale may be, and combustion of fossil fuels is, linked to a gradual warming of the earth. The Global 2000 Report, prepared by the Council on Envi-

ronmental Quality and the Department of State and issued in 1980, observes that "scientific opinion differs on the possible consequences of this warming trend, but a widely held view is that highly disruptive effects on world agriculture could occur before the middle of the 21st century." [Summary, Vol. I] The mechanism for this, the report says, is a rise of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) levels to nearly a third higher than preindustrial levels by the year 2000:

If the projected rates of increase in fossil fuel combustion (about two per cent per year) were to continue, a doubling of the CO<sub>2</sub> content of the atmosphere could be expected after the middle of the next century; and if deforestation substantially reduces tropical forests (as projected), a doubling of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> could occur sooner. The result could be significant alterations of precipitation patterns around the world, and a 2°-3°C rise in temperatures in the middle latitudes of the earth. Agriculture and other human endeavors would have great difficulty in adapting to such large, rapid changes in climate.



As if this were not disturbing enough, the temperature rise in the earth's polar regions is expected to be three or four times greater than in the middle latitudes. "An increase of 5°-10°C in polar temperatures could eventually lead to the melting of the Greenland and Antarctic ice caps and a gradual rise in sea level, forcing abandonment of many coastal cities."

- **DEPLETION OF THE OZONE LAYER.** The same report also comments on the problem of chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) emissions eating holes in the stratospheric ozone layer, which protects the earth from damaging ultraviolet light: "The most widely discussed effect of ozone depletion and the resulting increase in ultraviolet light is an increased incidence of skin cancer, but damage to food crops would also be significant and might actually prove to be the most serious ozone related problem."

Later writers are not so sanguine. Arjun Makhijani of the Institute for Energy and

Environmental Research (Takoma Park, Maryland) is quoted in *In These Times* as co-author of a recent report titled "Saving Our Skins," which projects some of the possible effects of depleting the ozone layer. The European Economic Community has issued a call to phase out CFCs by the year 2000, but Makhijani feels this may be "too late to avert catastrophe." The phrase is used advisedly:

"It is even possible that the resulting increase in UV radiation could reach levels comparable to those following an all-out nuclear war," the report said. Scientists have already determined that there has been a 1.7 per cent to 3 per cent ozone depletion in the stratosphere, creating a significant increase in UV radiation between 1969 and 1986. This startling increase, according to the report, could bring a substantial rise in human skin cancers, cataracts and suppression of the immune system. In addition, crops and the tiny plankton that form the basis of the oceanic food chain could be endangered. And global warming could lead to much greater frequency of droughts and unprecedented sea level rises. ["Here Comes the Sun," *ITT*, 4/5/89]

CFCs are also implicated in the global warming trend; they contribute as much as one fifth of the greenhouse effect. Should ozone depletion levels reach 20 per cent, the report says, people would start suffering "severe, blistering sunburns after one to two hours of exposure to the sun.

Outside work would become difficult or impossible." Since without labor there is no capital formation (no profit), this implies not merely declining but plummeting profits and a virtual end to economic development around the world.

Du Pont corporation produces 40 per cent of the world's CFC output. CFCs are used in some 100 million refrigerators, 90 million cars and trucks, 40,000 supermarket display cases and 100,000 commercial building air conditioning units in the United States. ["Here Comes the Sun"] As you might have expected, the producers of CFCs want time to study the problem so they can figure out how to soften the impact on their profits.

- **RADIOACTIVE POLLUTION.** Everyone now knows what a con-job nuclear energy was when its proponents began talking it up back in the 50s and 60s. Storage of the lethal garbage from spent fuels is not even the worst of the nukes. An explosive meltdown at a single nuclear power plant has the potential for making thousands of square miles uninhabitable for indefinite periods. The time it takes for a meltdown to get underway is measured in minutes. In 1979 the Three Mile Island reactor near Pittsburgh, came within seconds of doing in this country what the Chernobyl plant did in the Soviet Union. Chernobyl is with us still. Ernest Sternglass, professor emeritus of radiation physics at the University of Pittsburgh asserts that "there were at least 40,000 {more} human deaths {than normal} in the

**Continued on p. 10**