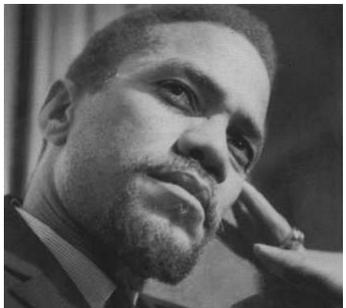


What Is Socialism?

by

John Reimann

What they said:

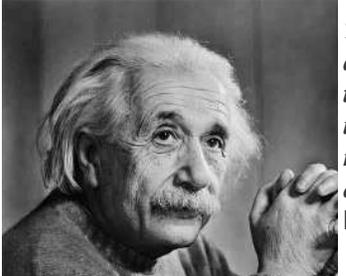


"You cannot have capitalism without racism"... Malcolm X

"Capitalism has had its day and must go.... Socialism means social ownership... and abundance for all."
Eugene Debs



"Either the triumph of imperialism and... a vast cemetery, or socialism."
Rosa Luxemburg

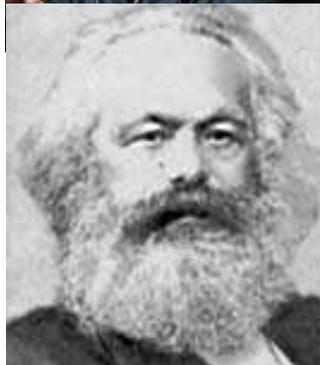


The economic anarchy of capitalist society... is in my opinion the real source of the evil...
Albert Einstein

Price: \$2.00



"Universal emancipation is the historic mission of the modern proletariat..."
Friederich Engels



"Workers of all lands, unite!"
Karl Marx



"We are engaged in the class struggle.... Maybe America must move toward democratic socialism."
Martin Luther King, jr.

Introduction to 2009 Edition

This pamphlet was first produced in 2004 – just five short years ago. At that time, as it said, “the rich seem to be more powerful than ever,” and there was no reference to the massive economic crisis that has since engulfed almost the entire world. How things have changed!

Today, hundreds of thousands are losing their jobs monthly in the United States, and millions are losing their homes. In other countries, the entire currency has collapsed. The owners of the factories, banks, insurance companies, etc. are now in desperate straits. Even that symbol of the power of US capitalism – General Motors – is on the path to bankruptcy. This will either be official bankruptcy through the bankruptcy courts or an undeclared bankruptcy; in either case, GM (and Chrysler) will be relieved of many of their financial obligations, first and foremost their obligations to their workers.

In many parts of the world, never in the last 75 years has the field been so open to the ideas of genuine socialism. Before, there was always the foul odor of what was called “Communism” – that corrupt, oppressive bureaucracy in the old Soviet Union. When that collapsed, all the corporate propagandists were singing the praises of the “free market”. “Greed is good,” they even claimed! Many, many workers and youth swallowed this propaganda.

Corporate America is not singing that song any longer!

Unfortunately, the collective memory of the workers’ struggle for socialism has been greatly weakened. It is this former struggle that can guide us in many ways in the struggles to come.

Rarely has there been a time when socialist ideas are more needed than today. Rarely has the opportunity for socialist ideas been greater. This pamphlet is republished in the hopes that it can help in fulfilling that need.

February, 2009

About the Author

John Reimann is a socialist, a retired carpenter, and an expelled member of Carpenters Local 713 in Hayward, CA. After almost 30 years of membership, including serving as an elected local officer, John was expelled from the Carpenters Union by the General President Doug McCarron. John was expelled for fighting for the membership, including helping lead the 1999 carpenters wildcat strike in the S.F. Bay Area.

John has also traveled widely and has done political organizing in the US, Mexico and elsewhere. He is presently an active member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Also by the same author:

Capitalism’s Perfect Storm - The Capitalist laws of motion and the environmental crisis

The New Apartheid - The history of Zionism and the rise of the State of Israel - a socialist explanation.

The Capitalist Economic Crisis - How the laws of motion of the capitalist economic system are at the root of the ongoing economic crisis.

What Happened to Our Unions? - How the officialdom of the mainstream unions have come to think and act like the employers.

For More Information, contact:

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also see:

www.iww.org/en/blog/1411

9-15-04

What is Socialism?

Over 150 years ago, a small pamphlet was published that opened a ghost is haunting Europe, the ghost of communism*. (*NOTE: This was before the rise of the Soviet Union and its bureaucracy. At that time, “communism” had a wholly different meaning; it meant a workers’ revolution and a worker-run society.) It was true; within months the whole continent was ablaze with revolution.

Since that time, capitalism has expanded to dominate the entire planet. Presently, capitalism and its overseers do not feel haunted by the ghost of workers’ revolution, however. On the contrary, the rich seem to be more powerful than ever. But in every country, those who don’t live off company profits and speculation, but have to work for their living, are having to work harder and harder to make ends meet. They are facing cuts in their earnings, their welfare, their rights and their very jobs. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the billionaires have been crowing that their system is the only one that works. And yet today too society is haunted. It is plagued by wars, racism, ethnic cleansing, and terrorism; by violence on an individual and a mass scale, by explosions that are ripping whole societies apart. Beyond that looms the threat of environmental disaster caused by global warming and the decline in energy resources.

In short, what we see is the threat of complete chaos in society – the society the capitalist class has organized and lead and has ruled over for centuries.

Capitalist wealth expands by leaps and bounds. Last year (2003) the total profits in the United States exceeded one trillion dollars for the first time ever. Yet every worker will tell you that alongside of this, everybody else is getting poorer. In the same pamphlet that talked about the ghost haunting Europe, Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels explained the process of the working class getting poorer. They wrote:

“The modern laborer... instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper (i.e. beggar), and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth.... (The bourgeoisie) is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery (as a slave to his/her job – a wage slave), because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie; in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society.”

What could be more true today? Even in the wealthiest nation on earth, working class people are chained by economic ties to their job and their paycheck. Even the best paid of workers are little but wage slaves. Meanwhile, tens of millions are forced to depend on some sort of government program or private

charity to feed their children, pay the rent, obtain health care. They depend on welfare, AFDC, Section 8 housing, as well as private food banks, etc. Their wages (if they have a job and receive wages) are insufficient to live on. In other words, society has to care for increasing numbers of workers, just as Marx and Engels described above.

“Walmartization”

Even in the boom years of the 90s and early 2000s, millions of jobs were sent to India, Honduras, or other low wage. The starvation of workers in those countries is used as a club to drive down wages here. Where industries do not directly compete internationally (such as in retail), low wage non-union domestic companies are used to lower the wages of all. Increasing numbers of workers are forced to work at Wal Mart-like jobs, with no health benefits and with poverty level wages. It is not an accident that the term “Walmartization” is becoming a popular term.

Now, with the economic crisis upon us, this process is being vastly accelerated, and workers are losing their pensions and health benefits. This is just the start of the process of capitalism driving down the living standards of the best-paid of workers.

Capitalism & the World Market

Today, capitalism has built such huge factories that they cannot produce goods for just one country, or even for a group of countries; they have to produce for the entire world or else they cannot run efficiently. Every capitalist country must have a steel industry, an auto industry, etc. if it is to be a world player. Yet the markets for these goods are divided up by the national borders and, anyway, not enough people can buy the finished goods at a price that would bring profit to the capitalists. In other words, we see global production and distribution clashing daily with the existence of the nation states. Trade accords like NAFTA and organizations like the World Trade Organization are an attempt to get around this contradiction, but they can only partially and temporarily do so.

At the same time, capitalism has developed massive productive powers,

Some 75 years ago, Trotsky said: “*History says to the working class ‘You must know that unless you cast down the bourgeoisie (the capitalist class), you will perish beneath the ruins of the capitalist civilization. Try, solve this task!’*”

In honor of those who came before and sacrificed and died for us, and bearing in mind the responsibility we bear to those who are still to come – the future generations, our children - we have no choice to but struggle to do this.

Number of children who die each day due to hunger: 35,615 (UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimate)

Minutes of Silence for these deaths: None

Plans for international response: None

Plans for saturation media network coverage: None

Effect on stock exchanges: None

Alarm level: Low

Primetime news reports on possible perpetrators of the crime: None

economics – “necessity” in other words. Where one chooses to live, the education available to one’s children – from cradle to the grave necessity dictates. In a socialist society, where basic necessities are guaranteed for all, workers would be free to choose what suits them best.

At present, we see millions of workers who devote their free time to watching the entertainment that capitalism makes available. Curiosity and creativity are discouraged and therefore in many people such qualities are buried. However, a socialist revolution would not only revolutionize social and economic relations; it would revolutionize personal relations and the personal qualities expressed by hundreds of millions of people. Artistic abilities that people did not even know they possessed would come out. Interest in the sciences, in history, in travel and meeting people (other workers) on different continents would flower. Just the massive effort to overthrow capitalist relations, in and of itself, would lend a huge impulse in this direction, and then a truly socialist society would build upon this.

The building of a socialist society does not mean that debate and political struggle would be eliminated. Just the opposite. There would likely be huge debates, possibly even different political parties formed, around issues such as where to place economic resources, how to heal the environmental wounds, education, etc. This differs from political “debate” in capitalist society, where all the most important questions are never asked. Also, under socialism, the debated would be truly around what is the best way to move society as a whole forward. As opposed to this, under capitalism what really is hidden behind all the main political debates is the question: What is the best way to assure the power and profits of the capitalist class?

“End of History”

In conclusion, we should recall the prediction of one of the strategists of US capitalism, Francis Fukayuma. When the Soviet Union collapsed, he claimed that this meant the “end of history.” He meant that now capitalism was here as the only system, now and forever. On top of this, of course, US capitalism was going to dominate the world without any challenge.

Look what’s happened since that prediction: We have had 9/11, the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the growing crisis in Russia over its domination of Chechnya, the disaster to the people of Southern Sudan (Darfur).

On top of this there is the issue of global warming, whose consequences appear to mean an almost certain disaster for millions. Plus the peaking of world oil supplies.

Given all of this, when one stands on the shore of the ocean and looks at the waves rolling up onto the shore, it does not seem so very far-fetched to imagine this scene – but devoid of all life on Earth, continuing throughout all time, but without life. Just this natural wonder alone with nobody to appreciate it forever. This vision can give a wholly different meaning to Fukayuma’s phrase “the end of history”, and this is where capitalism is taking us, if the working class does not overcome all obstacles and revolutionize society.

That is, the ability to produce massive amounts. However, it cannot produce these amounts, not because they are not needed, but because it cannot find enough people to buy back all its products at a price that is profitable to them. It is true that it is developing new markets, especially in China. But at the same time, it is shifting production to this extremely low wage nation, thereby eliminating higher wage jobs in the already-industrialized world. This cuts cutting into existing markets. In other words, capitalism cannot utilize the productive powers, the ability to produce, that it itself has created. It cannot solve this problem because the profits come exactly from this – the difference between what they pay workers and the value that these workers produce. In fact this problem (overproduction) is made worse by the wage cutting, the “Walmartization” of America.

This “Walmartization”, this drive to cut wages and eliminate health care and make workers work harder for less, is coupled with a drive to eliminate any controls on the corporations. They are insisting on the right to pollute, destroy animal and plant species, to go wherever and do whatever they like. In short, capitalism is on the move – it is attacking; it is on the offensive.

Clearly, workers must fight to reverse this offensive of capitalism. They must fight to maintain and improve their living and working conditions under capitalism. If they do not, then they will be forced into a situation of total poverty. The fighting spirit will be all but crushed. This is not going to happen without some huge battles, though. In the course of this fight, a vision must be developed and fought for of an alternative to capitalism – the vision of revolutionary socialism. In discussing that vision, we must consider how capitalism came into being and overthrew feudalism (the system of peasants, kings and queens) in the first place.

Early Rise of Capitalism

New discoveries brought into being the development of new means of production – machinery, factories, etc. arose. These new means of production revolutionized all social relations. By this we mean the relations that people enter into in their daily lives as workers. When people think about social relations, most people think about how they relate to their family and friends, about how their co-workers greet them in the morning, and what sorts of things they discuss at lunch time or whether they socialize after work. Under capitalism, however, “social relations” has a totally different meaning. In most workers’ more sober moments, they accept that they are nothing but little dollar signs to the boss. The boss may make small talk and ask after a worker’s family, but let a situation arise where this boss becomes convinced that the worker can no longer make a steady profit for him or her and they are gone.

What connects the worker to the capitalist is the “cash nexus” – the cash connection. The relationship is one where the capitalist owns the factory and machinery or the office and office equipment, plus the cash reserve, and hires the worker to work these “means of production” and produce a product for sale in the market.

These relationships changed in basic ways from feudalism to capitalism.

For instance, under feudalism, the peasant (“serf”) was tied to the land; he or she was forbidden to leave the land they worked. This was possible (and necessary) because they were not in the main producing goods to be sold on an ever changing



An Early Feudal “Manor”, or Small Town

Peasants were not allowed to move away and had little experience in life outside their manor.

market. In the main, what they produced was for the consumption of themselves or their lord. In the capitalist system, this would never work. Workers produce for an ever changing market. The capitalist must be free to hire – and fire – workers when it suits them. This means a different relationship.

Also, relations between the workers themselves changed. Under feudalism, the workers – the serfs – in the main worked individually. Under capitalism, workers work together to produce their products.

It is the sum total of these relations is that defines society as a whole. And the old relationships – the old society, feudalism – was holding back the

development of these new forces of production. For instance, the peasants were forbidden to leave their land. But where would the capitalists get workers for the new factories, if not by getting peasants off the land? Another problem: The nation-states (France, Britain, Germany) hardly existed in reality. Instead, the land – and therefore the markets - were divided up into this little valley or that mountain-side, owned and controlled by each small lord. This made it difficult, if not impossible, to transport and sell goods from region to region. Yet for the capitalists to fully take advantage of their factories, they had to sell on a national scale at least; they needed national markets. These (feudal) relations had to be changed; feudal society had to be overthrown. It was overthrown – in revolutions led by the capitalist class. This was why capitalism came to replace feudalism.

Capitalist Ideology

In the course of leading and organizing the struggle to overthrow feudalism, the capitalist class had to develop a set of ideas, an ideology, to replace that of the feudal knights, lords, kings and queens. They had to develop ideas that could appeal to workers to fight on their (the capitalists’) behalf. The feudal lords, in alliance with the Church, claimed that they held the right to rule from god – “divine right” they called it. In place of this, the newly-developing capitalist class put forward the ideas of universal liberty, freedom, equality. In the place of religious superstition, they put forward the idea of pure reason.

In other words, they developed a set of general ideas and slogans that were not drawn from any concrete situation, that is to say, from material conditions. They were general ideas around which society was supposed to be

a problem. Although every reputable scientific group today concedes the fact of global warming, the Bush administration claims that it is not yet proven and that more study is necessary. It is nearly certain that this global warming will result in the flooding of entire islands, elimination of vast areas where basic crops are



Capitalism is destroying the health of human beings and of the planet as a whole. Reversing these disastrous effects would be one of the major tasks under socialism.

produced, and lead to increased weather extremes (including storms, tornadoes, and drought). Some scientists also predict that it can cause massive tsunamis (tidal waves) as huge chunks of ice from the glaciers break off and fall into the ocean.

On top of this, there is the steady elimination of different species of plants and animals. This will alter the balance of nature, having affects that cannot be predicted. Then, on top of this, there is the steady creation of bio-engineered plants. Nobody really knows the long term affects of these, but they are profitable in the short term. Finally, there is the introduction of thousands of new chemicals annually. Few of these are tested thoroughly for their affects on causing birth defects and their affect in causing cancer is not adequately tested.

A socialist society would have to put major resources into healing the environment, including reversing the affects of global warming.

Life in General – Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the Russian Revolution (1917) and the leader of the struggle against Stalinism, called socialism the “leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom.” Under capitalism, the overwhelming majority of decisions made by workers are based on

forces workers to compete for education, jobs and housing. They are encouraged to see other racial, national and ethnic groups – as well as the opposite sex – as their competitors, rather than as their brothers and sisters in the struggle. The entertainment industry plays into this by encouraging negative stereotypes of black people, Latinos, etc. At the same time, it regularly associates sex with human exploitation and violence, encouraging this association in young people's minds. It also encourages a general fear of others (as brilliantly shown in the documentary by Michael Moore, "Bowling for Columbine"). All of this leads to a general level of racism and sexism in society similar to running a constant



Capitalism has developed based on exploitation of child labor, racism, sexism and poverty.

low grade fever. Sometimes, this racism breaks out into the open in a most vicious and violent way, such as in racist murders, spousal abuse and serial and gang rapes, etc.

On top of this, there is the clear racist and sexist discrimination and oppression by the capitalist class. Black and Latino people are regularly denied housing and jobs based purely on their race. They are regularly beaten and abused by the police and discriminated against in the courts. Women are routinely denied jobs and, if "given" a job, are routinely expected

to work for less wages than their male counterparts.

Under socialism, racist and sexist discrimination would not be tolerated in any way. Also, by eliminating the competition for education, jobs and housing a major impetus for racism, sexism and division would be eliminated. This does not mean that all of the scars of racism and sexism would be eliminated overnight. However, simply having come through a massive class struggle (a revolution) would be a huge step in this direction. Education and a society which truly encouraged all its members to explore and understand the world - coupled with the elimination of the economic base of racism and sexism as well as eliminating the power of the capitalist class, which encourages this – all of this would mean the ultimate disappearance of these crippling forms of thought and the brutality that has been associated with it.

Environment – It is not necessary here to document the environmental crisis which is coming. What is the reaction of the capitalist class here to this coming crisis? Bush,* as their foremost representative, basically denies that it is

* - *Since this was written, the capitalist class in general has recognized the threat to society - and to their profits - that global climate change poses. Their present main representative, Barack Obama, represents this change. However, they continue to insist on "market based" solutions. These are no solutions at all but simply an attempt to tinker with a few things. For more on this, see the author's "Capitalism's Perfect Storm".*

organized. Idealism, in other words.

It is no accident therefore that the first socialists were "utopian socialists". They believed in the idea of a "utopia" – a perfect society, whose basis was to be these abstract ideas of "justice" and "logic". They believed that all that was required was for some genius to develop a general plan for such a society and the rest of humanity – regardless of their class – would be convinced and would flock to their side. Class interests and class struggle had nothing to do with the matter, in their view. Capitalists would join with workers in building this new, pure society.

Yes, and the lion will lie down with the lamb (which may happen, after the lamb is safely inside the lion's stomach).

In other words, their views did not spring from existing social relations but from some sort of ideal, cooked up in their heads. They failed to take into account what was actually happening on the ground.

"Scientific Socialism"

Karl Marx and with him Frederick Engels stood matters on their head. They developed the ideas of scientific socialism (vs. utopian socialism) based on the real, existing social conditions. Their ideas were based partly upon those of the utopian socialists and partly from observing and participating in the rising class struggle. They explained that the rise of capitalist production brought with it a huge step forward for humanity. It *socialized* production. In other words, goods were now produced not just by and for one or two individuals. It was no longer the case of a peasant ("serf") working in the field for himself, his family and some for his lord. Now, a huge mass of workers gathered together to collectively produce goods that would then be distributed in society as a whole, rather than for personal consumption. This was a huge step forward, as



Karl Marx & Frederick Engels - the founders of scientific socialism.

it vastly increased what could be produced in a shorter amount of time. It also brought about a change in the consciousness of the workers themselves. However, the means of production – the big offices, factories, banks – remained in private, in individual hands. They were owned and run by and for private profit. Thus we have socialized production conflicting with private ownership.

What socialism aims to do is to resolve this contradiction by socializing the ownership, that is, by taking over the means of production. In other words, by putting these in the possession of society as a whole. This does not mean every single little business, but the commanding heights of the economy.

Commanding Heights of the Economy

A few statistics on the US economy show what this means. According to the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (published by the US Department of Commerce), in 2000 there were some 19,622 corporations which had assets of \$50 million or over. A breakdown of these figures shows that in the health care industry, for instance, the corporations of this size were a mere .02% of all health care corporations. Yet they did 14% of the business. In finance and insurance they were 20% of all such companies but did 31% of the business. And in manufacturing, they were .5% of all such businesses but did 40% of all business.

Dictatorship Over Society

These giant corporations, and the ones just below them, the ones with \$10 million and \$25 million in assets, constitute a dictatorship over society. They determine whether you will have a job or not, whether you will be able to pay the rent, buy groceries and send your kids to school. They determine what entertainment and “news” you see on TV. They determine what will be in the food you eat and the air you breathe and the water you drink. They all but determine who will be the next president and then determine what his or her policies will be.

They claim that their continued existence flourishes based on free competition and the free market. Yet let one of them get into trouble and immediately they run to the taxpayers for a bailout. *In reality, this “free” market is only really free – of any sort of regularity, of any sort of rationality, of anything that takes into account the needs of society.*

Revolutionary socialists argue that these giant corporations, the commanding heights of the economy, must be taken out of the hands of the capitalist owners and placed in the hands of society as a whole. In the place of the anarchy of the market would be a rational plan of production and distribution of goods, based on the needs of society.

Role of Working Class

In considering this, socialists recognize that it would not be possible to eliminate class differences in one fell swoop, to eliminate them immediately. However, we recognize that in any class society, that one class or another will rule society. In capitalist society it is the capitalists – the “rich and powerful” – who rule. In a socialist society, it would be the modern working class – the “proletariat” – that would rule.

This would mean a radical break from all of previous history. Ever since class societies developed (first the ancient slave societies, then feudal societies, then capitalism) it was a privileged elite minority who ruled (the slave owners, the feudal lords, the capitalist class). That class that actually did the work – whether they were slaves or modern workers/proletarians – did not run society. Society was run by and in the interests of this minority ruling class.

Under socialism, for the first time it would be that class that actually did the work, the overwhelming majority, who run society. This class would also have

There is also the direct link with US militarism, including the massive use of Depleted Uranium (DU) shells in Iraq. These shells create microscopic fragments that are low grade radioactive and their half life is measured in the billions of years. Already it has been reported that some 16% of soldiers who have left active duty and were previously in Iraq are reporting health symptoms that appear to be related to radiation illness. At the same time, the UN’s World Health Organization (WHO) is predicting a 50% increase in cancer rates by the year 2020.

A socialist society would, of course, direct itself first to providing health care to all, regardless of income or social status. By removing the profit incentive, all aspects of human health would be considered and researched, and all methods of cure would be available. This would lead to a more “holistic” view of human health – a view that includes use of acupuncture, chiropractic, massage therapy, etc.

Housing – It is estimated that “affordable housing” must cost no more than 30% of a household’s income. This means that for a family to be able to afford a two bedroom home in Santa Clara, CA (the highest cost area of the country) they must earn \$35.02 per hour. The lowest cost area of the United States is Puerto Rico, where the earnings must be \$5.94 per hour. However, this paltry amount is higher than the median wage in Puerto Rico (according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Housing is not simply a matter of affordability; it has a major impact on workers’ entire lifestyle. In the United States the choice is either to own one’s own home (reality a shared ownership with the money lenders) or be subject to the whims of the landlords. In addition, renting means sinking hundreds of thousands of dollars (over the course of a lifetime) into someone else’s property. In either case, there is no option for a more collective living situation – one where meals, childcare, and other aspects of family life are shared. In a capitalist society, where distrust and division are so encouraged, and where crime is a real threat for most workers, it is understandable why semi isolation in one’s living situation is preferred. However, in a society built on cooperation and solidarity, it is most likely that many people would want another alternative. We are, after all, the most social of all animals.

People would have many different options, and they would be genuine options, based on what they prefer, rather than what they can afford. These would include some sort of communal food preparation, eating, child care, etc. It should be emphasized that a more collective approach to living is what would be available, not what would be imposed in any way. It would be up to the workers, themselves, to decide what they want to take advantage of.

Education – Under capitalism, workers are educated to fit the roles for which they were born.

Racism & Sexism – Capitalist society encourages racism and sexism. It

It is not possible to fully predict what life in a socialist America would be like – no more than what capitalist America would be like before its development. However, we should consider some of the major issues confronting US workers.

Jobs – Over the previous two years, (2002, 2003) US workers increased the amount they produced per hour by almost 9% (source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics). However, the benefit of this has gone to the capitalists, who use this to cut the work force. Then, they use the unemployed to put pressure on the employed in order to hold down wages.

In a socialist society, increased productivity (output per hour) would be used to cut the work week. In addition, there would be huge savings through eliminating almost all of the military spending, spending for repression (police, a massive prison system, etc.), and the huge waste of advertising and commercialism. The workers in these fields could be put to work performing genuinely productive tasks – building needed homes, schools, recreation centers, etc., producing other goods needed by people. This would mean massive reductions in the work week, a huge increase in the free time available. Coupled with affordable child care and the availability of a more collective form of living, this would mean the availability of all sorts of further education, travel, artistic expression available to working class people.

Health Care –In 2002, health care costs increased at over 11% and the annual cost of health care now stands at \$1.6 *trillion*. These massive costs result in some 44 million people in the US going without health insurance in 2004 and some 18,000 dying as a result. Nothing could serve as a stronger condemnation of the capitalist, profit driven “free” market system than this profit-based health care system here.

However, it is not only the lack of affordable health care that makes this system so disastrous; it is also the direct influence of different industries on how health care is developed and delivered (to those who can afford it). The Oct., 1999 issue of “Sierra” magazine, for instance, reported on the influence of the chemical and oil industries on cancer research. They reported, among other things, on the Director of the American Cancer Society who is also the vice president of a major herbicide manufacturer. “High ranking officials in the National Cancer Institute routinely accept lucrative posts in the cancer-drug industry,” they wrote.

The American Cancer Society and the National Cancer Institute are responsible for the disbursement of the overwhelming majority of money going to cancer “research”. These two groups are notorious for their hostility towards anyone making the link between cancer and the environment.

The pharmaceuticals exercise a major influence over how human health is conceived and treated at all levels, from the research labs to the doctors’ offices. Many health workers report on the prevalence of drug pushers, masquerading as “sales people” who visit doctors’ offices, taking the doctors to lunch, dispensing free samples, and pushing the health industry in the direction of providing a drug for anything that ails us, even including “shyness”!



in its own self interest the lessening and ultimate elimination of class differences, rather than in maintaining these differences.

The basic reason why this is possible for the first time is that for the first time society is capable of producing enough to go around; general want only exists because of the role of the capitalist class itself, not because of what can and cannot be

produced. Scientific socialists have always maintained that this is the necessary foundation for socialism since there would be no conflict over necessities.

Workers’ Councils

Through what means would the modern-day working class, the proletariat, run society?

Some argue that the government, the state, must be eliminated immediately. However, socialists believe that this is not realistic, that as long as class differences exist some form of state will necessarily also exist. The issue is which class controls this state power? Socialists argue that it must be the working class. However, it will not be possible to do so by merely taking over the existing state apparatus – the elected representatives, the military tops, the court systems and police and various government bureaucracies. The working class will have to tear all of this down and begin anew by building workers’ councils based in the working class communities, the work places, the schools and even amongst the rank and file of the military.

This is not some idea that has just been cooked up by idle speculation, but rather it is based on real events of past struggles of workers. During the 1919 general strike in Seattle, WA, for instance, the strikers formed a general strike committee to coordinate the strike. However, in the course of doing so, this committee’s tasks also flowed over into other tasks. Workers realized that the population must eat and receive emergency medical care. Therefore, any business that wanted to continue to operate came before this general strike committee to receive permission to operate. If the members of the committee accepted that it was necessary or an emergency, then this business was allowed to operate. In other

words, in the course of organizing the general strike, the workers' representatives also tended to move on to the task of running society as a whole. Of course, this was just in a very limited way and for a very short time, but it provides a picture of what has happened in the past.

This tendency is not limited to this one example. The world over, workers have moved to form such workers' councils whenever the class struggle reached a fever pitch. The foremost example was that of the Russian workers during the



Workers' Council meeting after Russian Revolution - This council was the new form of government

Russian Revolution of 1917. There, these workers' councils started to take on full scope and challenged the existence and power of the existing capitalist state. A situation of "dual power" developed. This could not continue indefinitely; either one state form or another, either one class or the other, would dominate. In the instance, it was

the working class, through their workers' councils, who ended up on the winning end.

(Why and how that entire revolution ended up betrayed and collapsed is another issue that is fundamental but not within the scope of this pamphlet, except to say that the revolution was isolated and a situation of generalized want, including outright starvation, developed. This so weakened the working class that it was unable to maintain its rule.)

Socialists argue that there are several requirements for such a workers' state to run democratically and non-bureaucratically. The first is that all representatives be elected and be subject to immediate recall. That is, if the workers are not satisfied with the job their representative is doing, that representative can be recalled immediately. (This is not something that would be done lightly, and of course certain procedures would have to be established so that it isn't just done by some small, discontented minority. The important thing is that workers would be able to remove their representatives if they became convinced that it is necessary.) The second is that these workers' representatives be paid a wage equal to the average of the workers they represent. This is to eliminate the motivation of greed or self interest in being a representative; the sole motive would be believing in the cause. In addition, we believe that there should be a steady rotation of the representatives. This is to prevent an entrenched bureaucracy from developing. As was once said, if everybody is a bureaucrat, nobody is a bureaucrat.

the product of expanded, accumulated labor of the past. And yet this dead labor dominates the living labor; the past dominates the present. Under socialism, the present will dominate and utilize the past; the living worker will control the product of his or her past labor by owning and controlling the capital.

Socialism and the Union leadership

In order to initiate any sort of broader struggle to change society as a whole, workers will inevitably start by struggling to defend their interests as workers in the here and now – under capitalism that is. In the United States, the working class has built up mass trade unions as the first bulwark in the interests of furthering their interests. These unions are the traditional, mass organizations of the working class.

Yet today, the great majority of union members are completely disgusted with what is happening with their unions and with the leadership who control their unions. "Sleeping with the enemy" was how one workers described his leadership. A great many union members simply chalk this up to corruption or cowardice. This is not the core of the problem, though; the core of the problem is that the entire union leadership accepts capitalism, no questions asked.

Today, a group of union Presidents have gotten together to reform the AFL-CIO. They are calling their little club the "New Unity Partnership." The reforms they propose have already been put in place by the President of the Carpenters Union, within his own union. It is instructive, therefore, to look at what McCarron says, how he sees the employers and the workers.

"You(the contractor) need the freedom to assign the work based on what makes sense, what makes us all competitive on the job.... You need the freedom to assign the work based on what makes sense, what makes all of us competitive on the job. If there's a dispute, let the owner settle it. It's his money and his job..." Doug McCarron speaking to the 2000 conference of the National Erectors' Association

"In today's business environment, employers are essential; unions are not....

Can you complete a project without a contractor and owner? Forget it. Someone has to make work happen, shoulder risk and write checks. That's why employers are the only player who are absolutely essential to the process..." An article in the McCarron controlled "Carpenter" magazine, July/August, 2003.

In putting into words what all the top union officials really think, Doug McCarron is expressing the idea that workers are noting but a commodity and are totally dependent on the capitalists. The basis of this view, as expressed by McCarron, is that there is no alternative mode of production to that in which the capitalist "makes work happen." Therefore, they are constantly looking for ways to patch together an agreement - any agreement - with the employers. Any drive to transform the unions will have to take on this world view.

Life Under Socialism

“Stealing”

Then the defenders of capitalism attack socialism for wanting to take away, to nationalize, the means of production. “This is stealing,” they say. “It’s wrong.”



They got their billions by killing off the Native Americans, kidnapping millions of people from Africa and brutally exploiting all workers. Then they call it “stealing” when we want to take their wealth and use it to benefit society as a whole.

First of all, we should be clear on what we are advocating here. We are not talking about taking away people’s clothes, their homes or means of transport. Nor are the capitalists opposed in principle to doing that; in fact, they are doing it every day, as they lay off workers, repossess their homes and cars, deny them access to education. There is nothing wrong with this in their view – as long as it’s done under cover of their laws.

No, the horrible thing that socialists advocate is to take away the capitalist’s capital. Let us consider what this means: We are talking about the money, machinery, offices, etc. used by the capitalist to produce goods and services. In the “Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels explained what this capital is: “*Capital is a collective product, and only by the united action of many members, nay*

in the last resort only by the united action of all members of society, can it be set in motion. Capital is, therefore, not a personal, it is a social power.”

Consider the meaning of this. Capital is not like a worker’s automobile or kitchen stove, which is used by one or two people to satisfy their own personal needs. It is put to work, first of all by the workers employed by that particular capitalist. More than that, though, it can only be really utilized in conjunction with the roads and means of communication, with the capital of other capitalists, etc. In other words, capital taken as a whole is “set in motion” by all of society. And the products of this process are produced for sale on the market, as commodities. As such, capital is fundamentally different from personal wealth. Also, since all of society revolves around its use, it is the ultimate power in society. It is, thus, a “social power.”

When one considers, for instance, all the wealth that George Bush, John Kerry (and his wife Teresa Heinz of the Heinz Ketchup family fortune) were born with – the money, banks, factories, oil wells – this wealth was produced by the collective action of millions of workers. Through definite social relations – the ways in which people relate to each other in the production and distribution of goods – this capital is used to reproduce itself and to expand itself.

And, yes, we say that it is exactly this that we propose to take away.

This capital is really nothing but the wealth produced by workers of the past (whether it be of yesterday or 20 years ago). It is nothing but “dead labor”,

In addition, under normal conditions, there would not be a standing army. Instead, as long as there is any sort of threat or challenge from within or without, the working class as a whole would be armed and would receive training in the use of these arms. This would help make difficult the existence of a power separate and apart from the working class, standing over the working class. Of course, during a time of war, a regular, standing army might be necessary, but this is a different story.

In a democratically run socialist society, these workers councils, made up of workers’ delegates, would be the new state apparatus. Through them, a *plan for production and distribution* would be developed. Where necessary, these workers’ councils would consult with the experts – the engineers, chemists, physicists and health care experts. A general overall economic plan for the coming years would be developed.

Such a plan would not be simply signed, sealed and delivered by the workers’ councils. A key difference between how a democratic socialist society would plan the economy and how it was done in the old Soviet Union would be this: Such a general plan would be developed through discussions with the workers’ representatives and the experts such as engineers and physicists. This plan would then taken back into every work place and every working class community. It would be discussed and debated by the workers. It would be clarified what would be expected of them – what sort of hours would have to be worked and how much produced – if the plan is adopted. Through this process, the plan would (inevitably) be modified and then voted on.

This would have the centrally important role of being able to take advantage of the collective knowledge of the working class. In every work place, most workers know that there are many things which, if done differently, would be more efficient. Such a process would also tremendously stimulate workers to think about and “take ownership” over the process of production.

(In a nutshell, this exactly what went wrong in old Soviet Union – lack of workers control, of workers’ democracy. Therefore society was unable to plan and carry out the plan efficiently.)

Society Based on Cooperation vs. Competition

Clearly, a socialist society would be based on cooperation and solidarity, rather than competition and greed. The defenders of capitalism claim that this would never work, that people are naturally greedy and violent to boot. Whenever we look at the news, this appears to have an element of truth to it. At the time of the writing of this pamphlet, here in Oakland CA the two events dominating the news have been: (1) the killing of a 13 year-old boy in gang violence; (2) the police chase of a man who stopped on the street, dumped the three year old daughter of his girlfriend out of the car while the car was moving, and sped away. He dumped the little girl to make the cops stop and pick her up. (The girl ended up unharmed.) Why is it that the news ignores the millions of acts of kindness and of class solidarity that happen every day among and between working class people?

It would be foolish to pretend that there is not a lot of violence, greed

and selfishness in US society today. But despite what the geneticists say, people are essentially products of society and their environment. If we were incapable



Seminole Indians carrying crops for barter

The great majority of human societies were pre class, tribal societies like the Native Americans. Their economies were based on cooperation, not greed and profit. This shows that there is nothing inherent in human nature about economies based on greed and selfishness.

of anything else, then the unions would never have been built. Workers who built the unions knew they would not live to experience the benefits of those unions, compared with the sacrifices they were making; they made those sacrifices for the wider good of their class in general. The same was true for the Civil Rights movement in the South of the 1960s.

The fact is that the human species is the species which is the most free from instinct. It is the species for which the greatest variety of different modes of behavior is possible – the most flexible of all species. It is the most adaptable species of all. If in a given situation individualism and violence are the best modes to assure the survival of the species, this is what will be expressed. If solidarity and cooperation is the best mode, then this is what will tend to come out. Our amazing flexibility is exactly why our species has been able to flourish in the most diverse conditions.

What the defenders of capitalism are really saying is that competition is more efficient than cooperation; that private profit is the most efficient way to develop the economy. Any worker living in today's world can see the crisis that the profit motive has led to.

One additional point should be considered: When the capitalists consider

private profit, they always are considering the short term profits, the next fiscal quarter, or the next year at best. They are not considering the long term costs and benefits. So, for instance, when they consider the efficiencies of nuclear power, they do not consider the enormous costs and dangers of storing deadly material (nuclear waste) for hundreds of thousands of years. When they consider the most efficient way to produce food, they do not consider the long term damage to the earth, or the long term damage to people's health. Even on purely economic terms, though, these are costs just as much as the cost of wages or machinery. But the capitalist figures that he or she will be able to unload them on society as a whole, that is, onto the working class taxpayers of years to come. The capitalist class runs society based on the general rule: Privatize the profits and socialize (unload onto society as a whole) the costs and losses.

The depletion of oil supplies? The warming of the earth's atmosphere, leading to environmental crisis? The poisoning of the world's water and atmosphere with toxic chemicals? These are not things that show up on the quarterly balance sheet, so we will let others worry about it.

The capitalists claim that invention and development of new means of production would stop under socialism, once the profit incentive is removed. However, when one looks at the great majority of the great inventions – from the automobile to the modern computer – it is clear that most were developed by great tinkerers (like the Wright Brothers or the inventors of the internet) who were simply fascinated with the science and technology involved. On top of this, many were seriously interested in contributing something to society.

Within the work place itself, the great majority of workers are already motivated by a desire to work with their co-workers and to make sure that they carry their end of the stick. Under capitalism, this motivation is often seized upon by the boss to increase the work pace and find ways to lay off a sector of the work force. Many workers realize this, and therefore are reluctant to work harder, faster or more efficiently than is necessary. Once it became clear that producing more in less time would benefit workers and society as a whole, including reducing the work week, this motivation would develop even further.

Contrary to what they claim, it is often the profit incentive that holds development back. Entire industries seize on and prevent the development of new technologies whenever that new technology threatens their profits. Just look at what the record industry is doing with the issue of online music downloads. The refusal of capitalism to seriously develop energy sources other than oil (and nuclear) provides a more alarming example. This lust for profit threatens the continued existence of at least a large section of the human species.

As Marx and Engels explain, the capitalists complain "*Upon abolition of private property all work will cease and universal laziness will set in. According to this, bourgeois society ought long ago to have gone to the dogs through sheer idleness; for those of its members who work acquire nothing (other than their own necessities at best), and those who acquire anything do not work.*"