

Myths of Capitalism

A Marxist View

*By
Martin Pitt
Anne Kenefeck*

Contents:

Foreword
Introduction

Part 1

Chapter 1 Fundamentals
Chapter 2 Pre-capitalist societies
Chapter 3 The battle for capitalism
Chapter 4 The defeat of feudalism

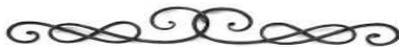
Part 2

Chapter 5 Capitalism triumphs
Chapter 6 Three further capitalist myths
Chapter 7 How capitalism works
Chapter 8 We have to change the world
Chapter 9 Our lives under this system

Part 3

Chapter 10 How can we change things?
Chapter 11 Reform or revolution
Chapter 12 The Russian Revolution

Conclusion



Foreword

This is dedicated to all those fighting injustice and struggling for a better world. We are right to fight. Human beings now have the capacity to feed, clothe, house and enrich the lives of everyone on the planet. But instead, the resources are diverted just to enrich an already very wealthy, tiny minority while the rest of humanity has to struggle on with the little that is left.

Consequently, the human condition is appalling. Hundreds of millions of people, one in nine of the world's population, don't get enough to eat, almost 15000 children under five die every day from preventable disease, millions suffer war, many millions are jobless and/or homeless and most of humanity experiences poverty, insecurity and anxiety. It is a world rife with racism, sexism, oppression and exploitation. A better world is possible but it has to be fought for.

But how? There is so much myth and fabrication swirling around in modern society it is difficult to know who and what exactly we're fighting and how to act accordingly. Some, quite obvious ways turn out to be blind alleys. So what can we do to change society permanently for the better? This is an attempt to find a way.

Introduction

We live in a world of myths. So widespread and ubiquitous are they that it is almost certain that the reader, and the writer, believes at least some of them. And the next person we speak to, the next news bulletin we listen to or the next social media message we read will undoubtedly reinforce the myths rather than enlighten us against them.

Perhaps one of the most debilitating and widespread is the idea that there is an unchanging human nature which is covetous, competitive,

greedy and selfish, and that this is why the world is as it is and why we cannot change it. Fortunately, this view, like many others, is quite untrue and science and history have completely refuted it. Similarly with the myth “there’s always been rich and poor, rulers and ruled, racism, exploitation and oppression”. There are a great many other false views. One dictates that the ‘modern’ family, that is husband, wife and a couple of kids has always existed, is the best, the most natural and most happy state. Other myths assert that our democracy is democratic and our justice system dispenses justice. Also, nations have always existed, or are at least age-old, and each of us has almost unbreakable bond to our own.

There are so many myths and most people believe them despite the fact that human knowledge has moved well beyond them. Numbers of people, specialists and non-specialists alike know them to be untrue, as the evidence exists. One conjecture as to why these myths endure and are not consigned to the dustbin of history is that they present a combined impression that the system we live under now is natural, normal, God-given and, though far from perfect, is the best of all possible worlds.

With so many myths to dispel where can we start? Perhaps it is best to begin with some fundamentals that we do know.

PART ONE

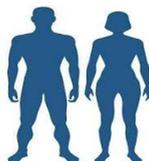
Chapter 1

Fundamentals

Are we human beings animals? Yes of course, we are. We eat, breed and respire. Like other animals, we obtain our necessities of food, drink and shelter from the environment and we have physical bodies which share the same evolutionary tree. Our genetic make-up is very similar to that of other animals and so too is our biochemistry.

There is little doubt about this. We are part of nature, breathing in a waste product of green plant metabolism, oxygen, in order to survive. We are apes, on the same branch of the evolutionary tree as chimpanzees, from which we diverged 7-8 million years ago. With 60% of genes in common with a banana, 80% with a cow and 98.7% with a chimp, we are most definitely animals.

But are we just animals? The answer has to be no. All the other animals get what they need from nature in mostly instinctive ways. Ants, bees and birds for example can build impressive homes and efficiently feed themselves, but have done these in the same way over the millennia. Human beings, by contrast, reflect on what they are doing, develop tools and techniques and hence improve their output. And as they learn, they organise themselves differently to employ their new tools. Hence human society changes. Animal society does not. Human beings therefore, unlike animals, have a social history.



Chapter 2

Pre-capitalist societies

That social history shows the different ways human beings have organised themselves in order to produce what they need. There is a need for some caution here as history is complex and “messy” and it’s important not to impose a rigid pre-determined structure upon it. But starting from the evidence itself and drawing out conclusions it seems clear that there have been at least four very different organisational forms that human beings have adopted over the millennia.

1

Hunter-gatherer society

Many of today’s myths can be dispelled by a look at this, the first mode of organisation. Hunter-gatherer (scavenger) society was the earliest and by far and away the most long-lasting. Human beings have been on this Earth, genetically unchanged, for more than 100,000 years and for fully 96% of that time we have organised ourselves in this manner. There were no social classes, no leaders and led, no state machines and no rich and poor. There was also no nuclear family, no racism and no sexual oppression. There was very little war and in fact the whole of society, both within groups and between groups, was necessarily based on cooperation and sharing. Being individually competitive and selfish wasn’t useful but collaboration was. We were nomadic, moving around in groups of about thirty, settling for a while until the area was exhausted of food and then moving on.

It is incredible that today the myth peddled is that “human nature” is essentially greedy and selfish when, for most of our history human beings have been the complete opposite. These simple facts about hunter-gatherer society do away with many myths so prevalent in

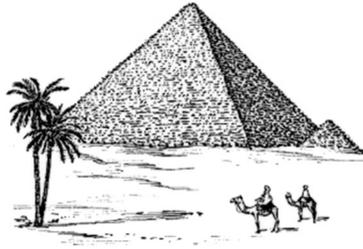
modern society. There is no selfish, greedy, unchanging human nature, there haven't always been rich and poor, rulers and ruled and state machines, and there hasn't always been oppression and exploitation, nationhood or even the nuclear family. These are all relatively recent features. Why then aren't we taught these things at school and why aren't they common knowledge? Could it be that it suits establishments not to draw attention to such facts which tend to undermine their position?

So after 95,000 years of hunter-gatherer existence, things began to change. It seems that with the knowledge we had built up over the millennia about soils, plants and animals we could now select particular seeds, sow, tend and harvest them, and store them against a harsh season. We could also domesticate animals such as goats, sheep and cows. This inevitably meant an end to our nomadic way of life and instead settlement into villages. Despite such a massive change, this "Neolithic Revolution", a transitional stage, still didn't seem to usher in an end to the sharing, non-oppressive culture.

It is important of course not to idealise either of these primitive societies. There were continuous episodes of starvation and disease, and certainly in village society, for the first time, there was a tendency towards war as storehouses could be plundered by armed raiders. But whole new patterns of life were developing, very different from ever before. The society became far more structured, normally along ancestral lines, and the population could and did increase substantially. With more advances in agricultural practice, a further and arguably even more profound change occurred, the "Urban Revolution". Human beings had learned that if they tethered a large domestic animal like an ox to pull a plough, production increased massively. At the same time great advances in the building of dams and irrigation channels, and the draining of land and fertilisation of soil also added enormously to the agricultural output.

These advances were the material basis for, suddenly, after just a few generations, the building of great towns and cities, and huge

monuments like the pyramids of Egypt and the palace at Knossos. There was also the development of writing and culture, of metallurgy and science. In short this was the very late start of formal “Civilisation”, just five or six thousand years ago, that is, about one twentieth or less of the time-span of human existence on Earth.



2

How civilised is Civilisation?

There is no doubt that this represented, in terms of production, output, human knowledge and capabilities, a huge, indeed mighty step forward. Great empires were built. But civilisation came at a price and amongst the earliest writings is to be found the word “slave”. Society had differentiated into social classes, rulers and ruled, oppressors and oppressed and exploiters and exploited.

There were material reasons for this. Cutting water channels and building dams required the cooperation of huge numbers of people, and necessitated division between those who supervised the work and those who undertook it. Grain storage too especially promoted social division. The huge granaries came to represent the source and preservation of life and as a result those that minded them and apportioned the grain assumed very high, indeed religious status. In fact granaries became the first temples. Underpinning all this was not just that a permanent surplus could now be produced, but that this was

limited. It was only of sufficient size for a small minority to be released from a life of labour, but not the majority.

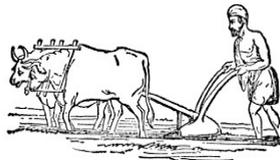
So only in the last 6,000 years of 100,000 or so did human society differentiate into social classes. Although there were social gradations e.g. subordinates, free citizens, peasants, slaves and so on, fundamentally it was the majority who worked often punishingly hard to create a surplus and a ruling minority who lived off it. The more of the surplus the rulers got the less did the toilers and vice versa. Hence there was a fundamental difference of interest between the two and there has been continual struggle over the surplus ever since. The earliest recorded strike was in Egypt in 1152 BCE.

With such opposed interests it was vital for the ruling minority to disarm the general populace so that inter-class struggle didn't get out of hand, overthrow them or tear society apart. They therefore set up a separate body of armed men under their direction to keep order. With this came a system of laws that the populace had to adhere to and a system of punishments if they didn't. This required numbers of judges, lawyers, prison guards, militiamen and/or soldiers and a bureaucracy. In short the ruling minority had to set up an armed state machine to keep order over the majority. In the earliest differentiated societies there was no law against owning slaves, only laws against liberating them.

So wherever society differentiated into social classes there has always been an accompanying state machine. But ruling by force, in the long run, was not sufficient. Rulers also had to rule by fraud. Even in ancient slave society they held that their rule was just, God-given, the only right and natural order of things and the high-point of civilisation. They believed that slavery was normal and good and couldn't envisage a society without it. The false world view of the minority rulers as foisted on the majority, is usually called 'ideology'. Here we can perhaps see a reason for the plethora of stubborn myths and fabrications in our own day.

Apart from slavery, ‘civilisation’ heralded another uncivilised development, “the world-historic defeat of the female sex”. Whenever class society arose, women who had always been co-decision makers with men were forced instead to become subordinate and dependent upon them. The ox-drawn plough was heavy labour, not easily done by women bearing or nursing children, similarly herding cattle, horses and oxen, long distance trade and of course warfare. As women’s economic position weakened so did their social position. And as wealth accrued to a minority of men inheritance became an issue as the man would want his riches to pass to his own children. Thus for the first time ever, monogamy became the norm. The subordination of women may not have been by intention or design but neither is there anything natural about it. It just occurred during a particular, relatively recent phase of history and with a continuing committed fight, it can be dispelled in the future.

Finally, with civilisation, war became endemic and has become a permanent feature of human society ever since.



3

The Great Slave Empires Die

The era of the great slave empires included the Egyptian, the Greek, the Persian, the Empire of the Indus, the Chinese and the Roman among many others. Some were progressive and others much less so. The Greek Empire in particular was extremely innovative with advances in

science, mathematics, medicine, astronomy and culture. We're also told it was the birthplace of 'democracy' but it is important to remember that democracy there was limited. This was after all a civilisation based on slavery, and that women, slaves and people from outside, like most of those involved in trade, had no vote. In its favour it is worth noting that these limitations had not been much improved upon 2000 years later in a country like Britain. So Greek democracy was a hugely progressive feature. But this great empire ended with conquest by Rome in 146BCE.

The Roman Empire was the last great slave empire in Europe. Unlike the Greek it had not been especially innovative itself but had borrowed advances from elsewhere. It died in the fifth century A.D., of exactly the same malady suffered by others. The health of the economy depended on conquest in order to acquire more slaves, and this became more difficult the further the empire spread. The price of slaves increased and members of the ruling class had to squeeze the slaves and peasantry ever harder in order to maintain their own lavish lifestyles. Peasant revolts broke out and the rulers quarrelled amongst themselves, leaving the empire even more vulnerable to invasion.

Incursions into the empire demanded more expenditure on armies which led to further exploitation of those left to work the land, and ever more impoverishment, discontent and insecurity. The shift of the capital in 330AD to Constantinople simply led to rivalry between the new capital and Rome, and other cities of the empire found it increasingly difficult to feed and provision themselves. Towards the end, Rome itself was sacked repeatedly.

The Roman Empire went into a spiral of decline because it had a massive superstructure and the material base of slave and peasant agriculture wasn't strong enough to sustain it. Several subsequent attempts at resurrection of something similar all failed for exactly the same reason.



4

How dark were the Dark Ages?

With the demise of this last great slave empire in 476AD, Europe went into steep decline. Cities were abandoned or sacked, libraries put to the torch, and literacy, art and culture degenerated, until the only centres of learning were the monasteries. Trade almost ceased to exist leaving the whole of Western Europe without cities, towns or connecting roads. Vast tracts of forest were punctuated only with occasional isolated hamlets where peasants tilled the land, supposedly defended by a local strongman and his retainers who demanded tribute in kind.

These were terrible times. There was famine, plague and war which halved the population, with the remainder living in fear and insecurity. With little trade, the hamlets had to be self-sufficient. Given that this situation remained for centuries throughout Western Europe, the term “The Dark Ages” applied here is more than apt. But while the west was stagnating, the decline of the great slave empires in the east resulted in the very opposite, giving rise to one of the most progressive in history, the Islamic Empire. The regular omission of this from most histories in the West is designed to bolster another present-day myth, that Christianity has always been inherently superior to Islam.



A Light in the Darkness

The Roman Empire had split and although dying out in the west, survived in the east as the Byzantine Empire. The Persian Empire was also in decline. By 640 AD these two had fought themselves to a standstill and both were now extremely weak. The new Islamic Empire, centring initially on Mecca and Medina could take on and defeat both. With its new religion, it was able to unite different tribes and peoples and spread rapidly right across the Middle East and North Africa and into Spain.

It employed the most up-to-date techniques in agriculture and repaired the irrigation canals of Mesopotamia, so the area flourished as did the Nile valley. It also became one vast trading block from the Indus in the east to Morocco in the west. Trading stations were established far beyond the Empire in India, China, Russia and elsewhere. It had an empire-wide banking system and textile, metalwork and pottery industries thrived.

Alongside all this was a blossoming of intellectual enquiry. Poets, philosophers and scholars flocked to the great cities particularly Baghdad and Cordoba. The Moslem scholars translated and discussed the ancient Greek, Persian and Chinese texts, and built on the ideas of Aristotle and Plato amongst others. There were also great advances in mathematics, astronomy, philosophy and medicine. This was in stark contrast with Europe at the time, which despite its staunch and “superior” Christianity, was then in utter decay.



The Rise of Feudalism

Through the interminable dark ages, Europe seemed to have been trapped in time and stagnating. But in fact there was change, albeit very slow, as the cultivators gradually began to adopt more advanced techniques from elsewhere in the world. Europe's very backwardness helped it, in that elsewhere, in the Middle East, China and India for example, once again the great superstructures of empire came at immense maintenance cost and therefore impeded advance. In Europe the heavy wheeled plough appeared which massively increased output. Fertilisation of the soil was utilised and water-mills built for grinding corn. Finally a social change emerged. Where slavery had been comparatively unproductive, here the toilers were relatively free and given their own piece of land to work. This was an incentive to work harder, adopt the new techniques and therefore increase production for everyone to live on. With this very slow change, towns began to re-emerge.

This was the beginning of a third type of social organisation, following hunter-gatherer and slave society. Far superior to slavery, feudalism surpassed it on every level. Rural output rose, and so did trade, and market towns developed together with a rich merchant class. While in the countryside serfs were tied to the land and to their lords, within the towns there were free artisans and traders. Although very much part of feudalism, the merchants constantly chafed at the system's laws and customs which severely limited their ability to enrich themselves. But as they did become gradually wealthier, the towns to a degree became able to resist the rule of the feudal lords.

Alongside these social developments, intellectual life revived and more and more people became literate. They could read the contemporary

works of Boccaccio, Dante and Chaucer in their own language. After the long night of the Dark Ages, the Greek, Roman and Arabic texts were revived and re-read, and universities sprang up in many cities across Europe.

But by around 1250AD the rulers, the feudal lords and the church together, were resisting this new thinking. Fearful of destabilisation of their authority, they clamped down on dissent and rational thought. Free thinkers faced persecution and a widespread reign of terror. The feudal lords again with the church launched expensive wars like the crusades and the 100 years' war, impoverishing the peasants and the towns. And throughout they also squandered vast sums on luxuries and ritual.

Chiefly because the rulers held back development, just as feudalism was equalling the cultural heights achieved by slavery, it suddenly crashed in the 1300s. In Europe, famine followed by plague led to a massive decline in population and production. The rulers, the church and feudal lords responded to the crisis by squeezing the cultivators ever harder in a spiral of decline reminiscent of the death of the Roman Empire. As a result there were peasant revolts across France, in Wales, Northern Italy and in England as the Peasant Revolt of 1381. Many towns supported these and revolted themselves amid a whole series of great rebellions. Nobles and lords turned on one other, and English and French monarchs fought in the seemingly never-ending Hundred Years War. The feudal victories within this of Henry V at Agincourt and Joan of Arc at Orleans have been used later in the mythical national histories of both Britain and of France.

But although there was a crash of civilisation every bit as calamitous as any in history and although the reactionary rulers could not be overthrown, the feudal system stuttered back into life and actually recovered relatively swiftly. Some towns were abandoned but the cities remained, with merchants becoming rich on trade, and artisans and lords wanting production of goods for exchange. The “putting out system” amounted to relatively wealthy town dwellers commissioning

peasants to make goods which they'd buy back at a low price and sell at a high one. Additionally long distance trade made many merchants very wealthy indeed, and lords and even monarchs invested their riches in this.



Chapter 3

The Battle for Capitalism

1

Feudalism flourishes

Clearly within feudalism power was shifting. The peasants were now not so much exploited by the lord as by the town merchants who were becoming more interested in manufacture than just buying and selling. Production became less about meeting people's needs and more about making profit on the market. Accordingly agriculture was turned over to industrial crops and money came into widespread use rather than payment in kind. So the revival of feudalism had been due to a leaning towards production for the market. Effectively the system recovered largely due to the bacillus within it of potential capitalist development, a bacillus which would eventually kill it.

But in the meantime feudalism didn't just revive, it thrived and prospered. Production for the market meant great wealth for some, and an intellectual revival much greater than before the 1300s' crash. Civilisation reached heights never seen before. The Renaissance of the 1400s onwards, a flowering of intellectual and artistic endeavour, began in the market towns and city states of Northern Italy and spread throughout Europe. This was the age of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, Raphael and Botticelli and the building of St Peter's Basilica in Rome and Brunelleschi's Florence Cathedral. Scholars translated the classics and challenged their world view particularly in the works of Kepler, Copernicus and Galileo. The adoption of the 'scientific method' based on empirical evidence yielded great scientific advance. There was also a burgeoning of art and literature written in local languages by the likes of Cervantes, Shakespeare, Rabelais and Marlowe. Innovations flourished, some from outside, some invented in Europe, including mechanical clocks, windmills, blast furnaces for smelting iron, cannon, muskets and the printing press.

2

The Crisis of Feudalism

But feudalism at its very height suddenly came crashing down for the second time and what followed was a period of 125 years of chaos, of war, famine, uprising, and revolution. These were the years of the Spanish Inquisition, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the German Peasant War, the French Wars of Religion and the Dutch Revolt. The Thirty Years War killed fully one third of the population of what is now Germany, and the English Civil War started in 1642. Underlying the overt reasons for the turmoil was the fundamental clash between those who wanted the preservation of the old feudal order and those who rejected it in favour of a new way of organising society.

Across Europe the church, feudal barons, bishops and monarchy wanted things to remain, with themselves in charge, administering law and

taxes favourable to them, and keeping firm hold on their serfs. The town merchants, craftsmen and burghers on the other hand, required different laws and taxes, administered by their own representatives, and needed the serfs to be liberated in order to work for them. Of course these vastly different aims were dictated by the way these two gained their wealth. And the second were getting richer, gaining more social weight and wanted to be free of the feudal yoke.

3

The First Crack in the Monolith

The antagonism between the two was less apparent when the feudal economy was doing well but the crisis of the late 1400s across Europe brought things to a head. The rich landowners and the church scrambled for more money by speculation and by squeezing more from the both the towns and the poor. In a century of growth huge superstructures had arisen with armies, state machines and bureaucracies, and these along with luxuries for the rich had to be paid for ultimately by peasant agriculture. This was too weak a base, and was the main reason why feudalism, as with slavery before it, went into crisis. All social classes were affected and inevitably there was a questioning of the old certainties. Information in a mainly illiterate society came through the Catholic Church whose doctrine had been the ideological cement holding feudalism together throughout Europe. This was the material basis for questioning of church authority, leading to the Reformation, Luther and the rise of Protestantism,

The Reformation began in Germany in 1517 where particularly the poorer people, the artisans, small traders and labourers embraced the new religion and resisted the church and the establishment. The rich townspeople who didn't like feudal rule, although becoming wealthy within it, often wavered and vacillated.

Protestantism spread there quickly and then beyond, to Switzerland, Sweden, Scotland, England and Holland. But it was resisted bitterly by the feudal Catholic establishment and the Catholic Church, the bastion of which was Spain. The most powerful state in Europe, its rule by a branch of the Hapsburg dynasty allied it with the Catholic Holy Roman Empire, ruled by the other branch from Vienna. These two alongside others fought to eradicate Protestantism and establish a Catholic feudal empire throughout Europe.

Their key target was NW Europe, a thriving Protestant area which today includes Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. Spain had fought it once unsuccessfully and was determined to crush it once and for all and draw it into its empire. Its invasion of the Low Countries in 1574 succeeded in seizing the southern part. Cities like Ghent, Antwerp and Bruges, having thrived for three centuries, were now under absolutist, feudal rule and stagnated for the next two hundred and fifty years.

It is not the purpose here to describe the many struggles and wars in these 125 years of turmoil and bloodletting, but it is important to conclude that the old feudal reaction triumphed. Only one small part of Europe, the Dutch Republic, had escaped the feudal yoke and was free to develop. Here there was an immediate flourishing of culture and science alongside economic growth. With capitalism being far more dynamic than feudalism the Dutch Republic was able to race ahead of every other part of the continent and prosper. And it was to be joined by England.



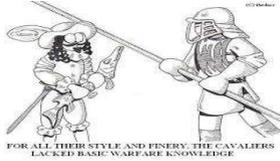
4

The English Revolution

The Reformation in England was, like some parts of Germany, carried out by royal decree. Henry VIII, ostensibly for personal reasons, broke with the Catholic Church and fatally weakened it by seizing its land. Furthermore England had managed to escape the Spanish yoke with the demise of Armadas in 1588, 1596 and 1597. Although England was relatively backward, the textile, mining and iron-making industries in particular were developing, as were the towns. Landowners gained by granting yeomen long leases on land, and yeomen in turn employed wage labour. So within England too there was slow development of capitalist methods of production, albeit within the feudal shell. With this, the contradiction and conflict between the feudal rulers and embryo capitalist classes emerged as in the rest of Europe. The artisans, labourers and smaller merchants were against the old order of monarchy, landowners, barons and knights, specifically represented by Spain in the 30 years war.

The English Civil War, a myth by misnomer, was in fact a revolution in which the old order, the king, barons and knights were decisively beaten and overthrown by progressive forces of merchants, artisans and townspeople. Charles I was executed and the way was now open for capitalist development in England too.

Holland and now England were able to progress while the rest of Europe, under the age-old rule of feudal monarchs, lords and clergy languished. Spain in particular went into decline. This situation spawned a great deal of reflection, ideas and questioning of the old order. This has become known as The Enlightenment and though its thinkers such as Voltaire, Hume and Diderot were not revolutionaries, their ideas helped undermine the ideological cement which held feudalism together. The rulers hit back and many of the leading figures were tortured, imprisoned or forced into exile and though their ideas tended to prevail, the decent society they had wanted did not materialise. For that to happen a revolution was required in order to sweep aside feudal rule. This duly came in 1789 when the great French Revolution changed everything.



Chapter 4

The Defeat of Feudalism

1

The French Revolution

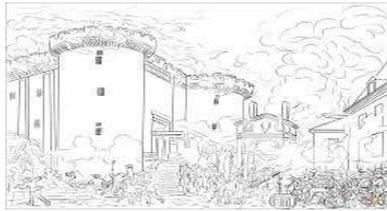
Again in France there was the same developing contradiction as elsewhere. While the feudal rulers permitted themselves great privileges and a luxury lifestyle there was increasing industrial growth and enrichment of the merchants, (particularly those dealing in sugar from the West Indies). These in turn tended to be pushed by those beneath them such as small trades people, artisans and labourers, to resist the rulers. So in France as elsewhere there was a fundamental clash between those who wanted to retain the feudal order and those who wanted change and development.

The fight came to a head in 1789 in a spectacular revolution which resulted in the complete overthrow of feudal rule and with it an explosion of radical ideas which spread right across Europe. As the balance of power across the rest of the continent swung decisively against the feudal order, the road to capitalist development was now open to others too.

Across the Atlantic a similar struggle was being played out. A decade before the French Revolution, America had been able to overcome

stifling British rule and was almost free to join the others on the road to capitalist development. This was held back by its own Southern Slavocracy and took more than a century to break through when the civil war put power into the hands of the industrial north in 1868.

Now capitalism was in the driving seat and almost everywhere, feudalism was on the wane.



PART TWO

Chapter 5

Capitalism Triumphs

1

So here we are. After a journey lasting more than 100,000 years we finally arrive at the latest mode of human organisation, the system we

are familiar with today, capitalism. Thus it hasn't always existed, it isn't a reflection of an unchanging human nature and it didn't just peacefully evolve, all fundamental tenets of the myths of capitalism.

The capitalist mode is very different from any other that has existed before. Though still a class divided society with all the basic attributes of state machine, exploitation and ideology, it acts in fundamentally different ways. First of all, it is far more dynamic than feudalism or slavery, let alone hunter-gatherer society. When the small Dutch Republic and England were able to develop in a capitalist direction, they quickly outstripped all the other states in production, power and empire. The outside feudal world in comparison seemed to be going backwards. Secondly production under capitalism is overwhelmingly for exchange on the market, not for immediate use, and so a third difference is that the exploitation of the toilers is veiled. Wage labour is just as exploited but nowhere near as openly as that of serfs, slaves or peasants had been. And a final difference is that capitalist states require hard borders, a single language and single monetary unit within them and a strong, centralised state machine. None of these had been necessary before.

Far from being a reflection of human nature, a God-given, natural system that has evolved over the millennia, capitalism has only been the dominant system for just the last few hundred years, that is, less than one three hundredth of the time human beings have lived on the Earth. Feudalism lasted a thousand or more, slavery thousands more and hunter-gatherer society for tens of thousands of years. Furthermore capitalism didn't just evolve but only came about through extreme violence. It is the most unnatural system imaginable.

Capitalists today insist that their populace remain peaceful, and choose to forget that their own social class owes its ruling position to violent overthrow of the old order. This meant revolution and regicide in England and France, and bloody revolt in Holland and America. They can argue quite legitimately that they had to overthrow the old ruling class in order for there to be progress. But that would entail

acknowledging their class's own violent past and legitimising arguments that progress now depends on the overthrow of the capitalists themselves.

2

Further Extreme Capitalist Violence

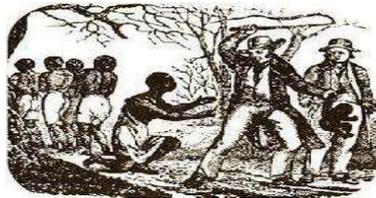
The violence didn't stop just with the instigation of the system. In Britain, then the foremost capitalist nation, peasants were forcibly cleared off their land and compelled to work in the 'manufactories'. This was an extremely brutal process. Once there, particularly during the industrial revolution of the 1700 and early 1800s, men, women and children were forced to work and live in unspeakable conditions in the cities and many, if not most died young. Life expectancy for labourers and trades people in Manchester in 1842 was around just 17.

Tremendous wealth was obtained early particularly by British capitalism with the instigation of the triangular trade. Goods manufactured in England were exported to Africa where some were sold and newly-enslaved people were bought. These were transported to the Americas and sold together with the rest of the manufactured goods. There, raw materials, sugar initially and later tobacco and cotton, were bought and transported back to Britain. Profit was made on each leg of the trip and the cities of Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow were hugely enriched along with the merchants of London.

However there was a problem for capitalists as to how to justify this abominable trade in human beings in these predominantly Christian countries, where "everyone is equal in the eyes of the Lord". The only option was to assert that black people were inherently inferior and not really human at all. And so it was only then, with the justification of the slave trade in early capitalism that racist ideas took hold. In the 100,000+ years of human existence on Earth, it is only in the last 350 years that racism appears. An illustration of this is that today it is very hard to know which Roman emperors were black as it didn't matter at

that time and wasn't recorded. But interestingly, it is only under capitalism that the question is asked. It is a myth of capitalism that people are inherently racist. Racism is not a component of an unchanging human nature but a historically determined invention.

Racism was still useful to the capitalists after slavery was abolished, in 1833 in Britain and 1863 in Holland. This time it was in order to justify empire. Today capitalism still uses racism to divide and rule the working class and convince them that black workers, Asian workers, other minorities and immigrants are the threat to them rather than their real exploiters, the capitalists themselves.



Chapter 6

Three Further Capitalist Myths

1

Nationhood – As old as the hills

Another invention of capitalism which is presented as fundamental and eternal is that of the nation. Under feudalism the peasantry generally didn't travel and spoke a dialect incomprehensible to those outside the immediate area. They produced just for the local lord of the manor,

themselves and the village, and the local lord served the king, in a fixed hierarchical order where everyone knew their place. Nowhere in the structure was there a concept of nation.

For the capitalists, this whole structure and mindset had to go. They wanted a large domestic market for their goods within which people, commodities and money could move freely. As noted, they needed the area to be state controlled where taxes and laws would be respected and enforced, and they required a single language and single monetary unit throughout. So borders were carefully drawn and defended, old dialects were forcibly discarded and importantly, an ancient history and culture for the new nation invented. The state machine was tightened and people were encouraged to think of themselves as citizens of a national community.

France was doing the same as England, for the same reasons, and war between the two new countries from 1803 entrenched nationalism in both. Today we are persuaded to believe that nationhood is natural and ancient, whereas it is a very new concept. Germany and Italy were only unified as nations in 1871 and many Middle Eastern countries were only formed in the 20th century.

2

The Nuclear Family – Normal and natural?

There is another important product of capitalism which our establishment would have us believe is natural, god-given, morally right and eternal, and that is the nuclear family. Under feudalism the family was a large extended group, made up of people often not biologically related. It was a productive unit where everyone worked for the household and the village. Under capitalist rule this local structure had to be broken up, and this process began when people were torn from the land to work in the towns. As noted, initially men, women and children would slave for long hours in the factories in abysmal

conditions, but in the mid 1800s this changed. The capitalists wanted the cheapest way of raising the next generation of workers and this was via unpaid labour in the home. They also wanted the old and the sick to be looked after without costing the state any money. To these ends the family wage was instigated in the mid 1800s whereby women and children were spared the punishing conditions of the factories and mines, and the man would be paid a higher wage to support them. This was the beginning of the modern family unit which was later to be consolidated as the nuclear family, a wholly new invention.

3

LGBT+ – Abnormal and unnatural?

It is chillingly logical that the promotion of this family unit in Victorian times would lead directly to the oppression of LGBT+ people. Before this there had been no reason to see humanity divided between heterosexual people on the one hand and everyone else on the other. But the capitalist need for the nuclear family created prejudice against any sexuality outside this “norm”. The family was deemed respectable and anything else was disreputable. Sex between men was criminalised in Britain only in 1885 and in other countries around the same time, infamously highlighted by the high profile case against Oscar Wilde in 1895.

Capitalism these days is nodding towards LGBT+ rights, partly because the economy needs them, but chiefly due to the brave struggles over years and across the world for equality.



Chapter 7

How Capitalism Works

1

A fair day's work for a fair day's pay: where do company profits come from?

Uniquely, under capitalism, things are made not for immediate use, but for exchange, i.e. to be sold on the market. The capitalists bring a bewildering variety of goods to be sold, from cars to toothpaste, houses to jars of coffee, bicycles to phones. But to assess the comparative value of such diverse products needs a common factor. As these are all the product of human labour, then the common value must be the amount of human labour expended in making them. This measurement was much clearer under feudalism with direct exchange. If a table could be made in a day and a harness made in half a day, then peasants would exchange one table for two harnesses. Value can only be measured by the labour time it took to make. A motor scooter is much more expensive than water not of course because it is vital for life but because so much more labour time is required to produce the scooter.

When the capitalist sells a commodity on the market, the money received first pays off their costs of production, including the workers' pay, and then the excess is profit. But if the value of a commodity is the amount of labour time expended on its production, only part of the worker's day can be spent producing enough for his or her keep, because the rest of the day is spent on producing value purely for the capitalist. This is precisely the same relationship as the peasants to the lord, but that exploitation was visible when the peasants either handed over goods produced in their homes and fields or physically went and worked on the lord's land. In capitalism the exploitation is hidden under the misleading unfounded epithet, "a fair day's work for a fair

day's pay". The workers' pay may be the going rate, but it is less than the value they produce. The difference is profit for the capitalist.

2

Why is capitalism so dynamic?

It follows from the above that to maximise their profits, employers have to minimise their wage bill and therefore the workers' income. Workers are forced to resist, and under capitalism, as with feudalism, we have the same struggle with the rulers over the surplus the toilers produce.

In capitalism innovation is an imperative, which is why it is so much more dynamic than any system that has gone before. Capitalists are in competition in the market and the one that produces most efficiently and therefore cheaply, undercuts their competitors. One key way to reduce price is to cut the duration of manufacture, that is, the quantity of labour time required for its production. So capitalists are forced by competition to introduce the most advanced and productive tools and technology. Under slavery or feudalism there was no compulsion to do this. But the capitalist that doesn't innovate faces extinction.

3

Why does capitalism continually go into crisis?

If manufacturers feel that times are propitious to make a profit, they borrow money from the banks and invest in raw materials, machinery and labour. Workers produce the goods for sale on the market and everything proceeds splendidly. The capitalist sells the goods and pays off the bank, the suppliers and the workers and what is left is profit.

The system seems to be working for a while. But unfortunately because capitalism is unplanned, demand for raw materials, tools and labour goes up without any increase in supply of these things. Therefore these costs of production, including interest rates, go up. And what is left as profit goes down.

In every capitalist boom the costs of production rise, profits decrease and sooner or later the capitalists decide it is not worth investing. Orders for tools and raw materials dry up and companies lay off workers and/or go bust. There is then a decrease in demand for other goods and the recession spreads to the rest of the economy. Most booms end, not with a smooth levelling out or even a slow decline, but a crash and a recession. Factories are closed, machinery lies idle, and goods remain unsold. And every recession leads to untold misery as workers lose their livelihoods and with it their ability to adequately house, clothe and feed themselves and their families.

As the recession proceeds, the demand for money, raw materials, machine tools and labour declines, and interest rates fall along with it. When the costs have fallen far enough, some capitalists will calculate that it's worth investing again, triggering the start of a new boom.

Recessions could be avoided without competition, allowing supply of extra raw materials and machine tools to be planned and provided in advance to aid the boom. But that wouldn't be capitalism as its very essence is competition.

Boom-slump, boom-slump is equivalent to the breathing in and out of capitalism. That's how it came into the world, how it proceeds and how it has to continue. This is its normal working and there is no cure for slumps within the system. So there were recessions in Britain in 1706, 1709, 1752 and continuously throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And in just the last 50 years there have been recessions in 1975, 1980, 1990, 2008 and 2020.

Some economists insist that if it is just left to the “hidden hand” of the market, supply and demand will naturally balance and the whole thing will proceed smoothly. They can’t explain why this has never worked, but a close look at the boom-slump cycle provides a simple answer. In the upward curve, when capitalists and workers have money, the demand for goods is high, but these haven’t yet been provided in sufficient quantity. So demand exceeds supply. On the downward curve, capitalists won’t invest, workers are poor and there is “overproduction” as goods lie rotting for lack of buyers. Supply then outstrips demand. In brief, in the boom demand outstrips supply, in the slump supply outstrips demand and the two only ever meet at the very top of the boom and the very bottom of the slump, moving in opposite directions. Capitalism by its very nature cannot match supply and demand. Therefore the boom-slump cycle is inevitable.

But there is another inbuilt fault line in capitalism. For the capitalists to continue to compete on the market they must provide increasingly expensive equipment. Whereas two centuries ago the worker would only need a hammer or crude loom to produce competitively, today computerised tools, robots and other high-tech are necessary. So just to stay in the race, the capitalist has to constantly reduce the proportion of investment in the worker, who is actually the source of profit. So with time the return on the same amount invested decreases.

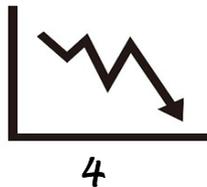
Thus on the upswing of the cycle, the costs of production don’t have to rise much before the capitalist is dissuaded from investing further. And on the downswing the costs must fall further each time before investment is attractive again. Over time the booms get weaker and shallower, the slumps deeper, lengthier and more difficult to recover from. The boom-slump cycle sags and droops, and the cause of this is the inbuilt fall in profit per unit invested. But this profit is the system’s drive, its energy and its vitality and it is running out. Capitalism is aging.

This alone shows that capitalism is a historically determined and limited system and that it will die. Today the return for every pound, dollar or

yen invested is close to an all-time low. So that although capitalism has been the most dynamic of systems and is, comparatively in years, very young, it is already very old.

Capitalists themselves hate slumps and suffer whenever they occur, so they pay economists a great deal to advise how to avoid them. But given that their starting point is always that slumps *can* be avoided, the economists can never adequately explain any recession. No wonder the analysis even for Nobel prize-winning economists amounts to “everything is splendid and then comes the debacle”. No wonder understanding the historic 1929 slump is considered to be the Holy Grail and no wonder traditional economics has been dubbed “the abysmal science”.

Accidents and events like the dot-com bubble of the early 1990s, the pandemic-caused recession of 2020 and the arms spending boom in the post 1945 world can affect and complicate the system’s basic workings but these then re-establish themselves with time.



Imperialism

Two centuries ago in any one capitalist country there would be tens of thousands of companies, small by today’s standards, with a state machine which oversaw their combined interests. But with every recession numbers of these companies failed allowing others to take them over cheaply and expand. Over time some would become so large that one or two would come to dominate whole sectors of the national economy. These would also be searching the world for raw materials, spheres of influence and markets, and would inevitable run into competition with similar corporations from elsewhere. This process is

happening now and ultimately who gets what is settled by force of arms. Companies do not usually possess arms, but their states do, and being bound to identify with their companies' interests, the state is forced to operate outside its own borders.

This logical stage in capitalist development is 'imperialism'. Just as companies are forced by competition to act in extremely anti-social ways so too are their states. Where companies keep wages low, close whole plants and destroy workers' livelihoods, and also despoil, pollute, and exploit whatever they can, their states in support are forced to behave even more violently, including invasion, occupation, domination, and often mass murder and torture, all for profit.

Throughout the 1800s, Britain as the first developed capitalist nation forged a huge empire on which it was said, "the sun never set". It became enormously wealthy and bullied, invaded and colonised countries around the world. For two centuries in Britain to the present day, that empire has been declared a 'civilising mission'. But the ugly truth is that that "mission" was really one of plunder, robbery and the crushing of any opposition, all to enhance British commercial interests. Before British colonial rule, India was one of the richest countries, producing 25% of the world's GDP. By the time the British left, in 1948, this was down to just 1%, and India reduced to one of the poorest countries, a synonym for 'third world' underdevelopment, poverty, disease and deprivation. Life expectancy had fallen to just 23 years.

Yet people in Britain and elsewhere were deceived by their rulers into believing that empire was something to celebrate. On Empire Day, the birthday of Queen Victoria, "Empress of India", school children dressed up, marched, and skipped round their playgrounds waving British flags and singing imperialist songs. And yet the union jack, the union flag is still referred to by millions around the world as "the butcher's apron". Why are British children not taught about all this at school?

Treatment of the colonies was racist, brutal and bloody. It is not the purpose here to describe this in detail but some real sense of this can be

gained from John Newsinger's book, aptly entitled "The Blood Never Dried".

Throughout the 19th century other countries were catching up economically and militarily and building empires of their own. Towards the end of the 1800s the huge continent of Africa was sliced up between the relatively advanced empire nations not only of Britain but also France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Italy and Germany. At the beginning of the 20th century empires in competition inevitably clashed in the First World War, involving those of Britain, France, Russia, and the USA against the German, the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian. In this the bloodiest human conflict in history until then, the ancient Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires were annihilated and harsh measures imposed against Germany.

The Second World War was a follow-up to the First, but on an even greater scale. It involved slightly different belligerents, Germany, Italy and Japan against France, Britain, Russia and the USA, but the underlying causes, based around imperial competition were essentially the same.

Imperialism Today – The state abroad

Today imperialism looks rather different from the traditional capitalist empire. The British Empire had retained standing armies and governor generals who ruled like monarchs over the newly colonised 'citizens of the British Empire'.

When the 300 year-old British Empire was supplanted after the Second World War by the American Empire (never officially referred to as such), it tended not to deploy standing armies. Subordinate nations were not formally owned or directly ruled, and their citizens were not considered citizens of anything other than their home country. But control by the imperial nation was none the less real for all that.

The US, like Britain before it, claims the right to interfere anywhere in the world it wants to, in order to pursue its interests and those of its companies. Consequently, not only does it have nearly 800 military bases large and small around the world, but its record abroad in terms of human rights, democracy and independence is appalling. It has been a catalogue of invasion, military coups, assassination and bombing, destabilisation and sanctions, promotion of oppositions however odious and threats and bullying.

The excuse given tends to be that it is promoting democracy and freedom. But the US has a long record of attacking and overthrowing democratically elected governments who try to raise the living standards of their own citizens. Mossadeq in Iran in 1953, Allende in Chile in 1973 and Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 were all popular, democratically elected leaders but the US replaced them with brutal dictators whose citizens were then anything but free. These imperialist actions hardly amount to the promotion of democracy and freedom.

In reality, like Britain before it, the USA promotes dictatorship. The Shah of Iran in 1953, Suharto in Indonesia in 1967, Yahya Khan in Pakistan in 1969, Pinochet in Chile in 1973, Videla in Argentina in 1976, Habre in Chad in 1982, amongst many others were all new regimes, guilty of mass murder, torture and state terror. And all were backed to the hilt by the USA. Today it supports the dictatorships of the Saudi royal family, those of other Gulf states, and that of Al Sisi in Egypt and other autocratic leaders. Is this a consistent record of promoting democracy across the world?

Again, like Britain before it, the US overrides human considerations in pursuit of its political and economic interests. It supports Israel in its illegal occupation, and its torture, murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians. In recent times there has been actual US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, with accompanying massacre and torture, military intervention by proxy in Syria, Libya and Yemen, and sanctions and threats to Iran, Venezuela, China and others. So time and again the US undermines, bullies and overthrows democratic regimes which it sees as

not acting in its interests, and replaces them with dictators who do, and who also systematically violate human rights. This, and not the mythical pursuit of democracy, is the long, consistent record of the US abroad.

Of course other states elsewhere in the world, large or small, are forced to fight against each other, form and break alliances, bomb, invade and intimidate, if they are strong enough, in order to promote their interests. So Russia and Iran support Assad in Syria and Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States fight Iran in Yemen. Numbers of countries supported different states in the bloody break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Azerbaijan still fights Armenia, Turkey brawls with Greece and India clashes with Pakistan. America pours money into Israel as it oppresses Palestinians and takes their land, and generally pursues US interests in the Middle East. Then internally the states of Turkey and Iran separately fight Kurds, Myanmar slaughters the Rohingya, China suppresses the Uyghurs, Sri Lanka controls the Tamils and India oppresses Moslems. All countries oppress and punish immigrants. In the world today there are wars raging in Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, the Maghreb and Sahel regions of North Africa and elsewhere.

Such a long list makes for depressing reading and there is no chance at all that such violence will end. Liberals everywhere rightly condemn it but then work with the system which makes it inevitable. Just as companies have to behave brutally to stay in the capitalist race, so do states.



The state at home

Those who are suddenly confronted with the workings of the domestic law are often shocked by its lack of sympathy and understanding, and

by the unfairness and sheer injustice meted out by the justice system. It is also stark that those who appear in court to be tried are overwhelmingly and disproportionately poor and from ethnic minorities, and the judges who try them are overwhelmingly and disproportionately rich and are members of the ruling class. The boss who steals his workers' pension fund, leaving them without either jobs or future security is allowed to walk free. The woman who cannot keep up catalogue payments for her kids' clothes is jailed. No police officer has ever been convicted and imprisoned for any of the many deaths in custody. There is no law against any boss closing their company just to preserve their funds, thereby ruining the lives and livelihoods of their workers. And employers can easily use the courts to stop strike action. Miscarriages of justice abound.

This can all come as a surprise because the image presented of the law is the opposite. Cinema, theatre, books and the media talk of justice being synonymous with the system of law. A constant theme of the western for example is of the hero bringing order to the lawless west against those who "have no respect for the law". Crime novels are about bringing villains to justice. We're told that the law protects the weak, that no-one is above the law, and everyone is equal before it. Myths abound in the world of law and order.

The law hasn't protected the Native Americans, or the Palestinians from losing their lands, nor the Uygers or Kurds or Rohingers from the same. The weak are never protected from the crimes of the state, because the law is a part of the state. "No-one is above the law" but among many examples, a British government minister found to have broken the law in 2020 was absolved by saying that he and his department had learned their lesson. And the fallacy of impartiality was well illustrated by Anatole France when he wrote: "In its majestic equality, the law forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, beg in the streets and steal loaves of bread".

The key point here is that the law in its very essence is unjust. It has to be in order to do its job of maintaining the status quo. The law in slave

society upheld the practice of slave ownership and punished those who tried to free themselves or others. Similarly in feudal society serfs were tied to the lords who often themselves dispensed the justice that suited them. In the peasants' revolts and the Reformation, the law was harsh on those who fought for a better world. Under capitalism too the law is there to protect the system. It is a vital part of the state, using force against the toilers fighting for justice. Therefore it is incapable of dispensing justice to the majority.

One of the most brutal periods in British history was that of the clearances at the beginning of capitalism when the establishment seized the peasants' common land. They wanted it for themselves but also were determined to displace much of the peasantry. The latter would then have no other means of survival but to work for them in the factories and the towns. And this was entirely sanctioned by the law. An anonymous poet wrote these famous lines sometime in the 1700s:

The law locks up the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common
But leaves the greater villain loose
Who steals the common from off the goose.

The law claims to be independent, but this is both illusion and myth. It is in fact a ritualistic, ornately embroidered veil to cover ruling class violence against the majority.

Today the immediate agency of class violence is the police. They are inseparable from the establishment and are there to protect its property and its rule. For the police to do their job they have to believe that the capitalist system is worth defending, that it is good and just and the best of all worlds. They have to believe that "our" way of life is constantly under threat from foreigners, trade unionists, LGBT+ people, progressives and other ne'er do wells who want to change it. The police must hold reactionary views, and it was no surprise that the

Macpherson Report in 1999 found them to be institutionally racist. But they are also guilty of institutional sexism and much else. The point is they have to be, and they cannot change otherwise the justification for what they do is undermined.



Chapter 8

We Have to Change the World

1

Human needs

In a modern world where we have such powerful means of production, we can now produce a huge surplus, sufficient to feed, clothe, house and enrich every single person on Earth. Instead the opposite is happening. Even in the wealthiest countries there is a massive disparity between rich and poor with much of the populace suffering alienation and anxiety. Many children are denied an adequate diet and their parents are weighed down with problems not of their making. There is widespread homelessness, unemployment and hopelessness, and also unremitting neglect or ill-treatment of the victims of these abuses. And everywhere there is constant racism, sexism, oppression and exploitation.

In the poorer countries the situation is far worse. Alongside continuous hunger, malnutrition and sometimes starvation, people are suffering and dying from easily treatable diseases. Incessant war and continuous

economic crisis causes misery to millions. Charities can and do aid victims and this is vital work, but they can only deal with the consequences of the system. They cannot change it.

The Future - aggression

These present conditions are intolerable, but without an effort to change things the future looks even worse as capitalism goes further into crisis. The scenes of starving people will be re-enacted again and again, and so too those of war-torn cities and people driven from their homes, and on an ever increasing scale.

War is as endemic to capitalism as it was to feudalism and to slave society, but with industrialisation, capitalist war is infinitely more destructive. Today there are many wars around the world but the underlying causes are essentially the same. As we have seen, capitalist states have to fight others for raw materials, markets and spheres of influence, and as long as we have capitalism, we'll have wars. With the accompanying stockpiles of arms around the world, already huge and growing rapidly, sooner or later our rulers will deliver us a nuclear world war.

This is far from unthinkable. Currently, how will an economically weakening USA, deal with China which is becoming stronger daily and threatening to supersede it? Already the US is imposing sanctions and threatening aggression in the South China Sea.

The future – neglect

But perhaps the most pressing danger facing humanity is the looming catastrophe of global warming. The facts are increasingly well known. Capitalism requires huge quantities of energy just to stand still. So it burns coal, coke, gas and oil on a massive scale, releasing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. These trap the sun's heat which warms the oceans and melts the Earth's ice caps. This raises sea levels, destabilizes climates and gives ever more extreme weather patterns. So

in the last year alone there has been some of the most severe weather on record with floods, heat waves, forest fires and tornados. Carbon dioxide levels are now the highest in 3 billion years and rising year by year. Global warming has grown spectacularly from the start of the industrial revolution in the 18th century but particularly in the last 40 years. The most recent seven years have been the seven hottest.

Then there are “feed-back” mechanisms which make the situation far more dangerous. As the sea warms up it can dissolve less and less carbon dioxide so releasing the stored gas into the atmosphere. The melting ice-caps mean less dazzling white ice and snow to reflect away the sun’s rays (the Albedo Effect), and more dark seas to absorb the heat. This further melts the ice and release yet more carbon dioxide. In addition the warming of the frozen earth of the tundra releases methane which is an even more damaging greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

Scientists believe we are approaching a tipping point and that unless global warming is brought under control within the next decade, then all life on Earth, including human life could become impossible.

Even in this dire situation, with carbon dioxide levels at an all-time high and still rising, governments still only make non-binding promises for the distant future, and actually do very little in the present. Climate change summits are inevitably disappointing, as governments are continuously wary of jeopardising their position in the world, or that of their companies.

Consequently we cannot rely on them to make the radical changes necessary to save the planet. For the same reasons companies themselves will not act if change involves any loss of profit. Research by Exxon, the huge oil company, actually proved that burning fossil fuel leads to global warming. But as soon as this fact became more widely known, the research programme was immediately halted. Instead, huge sums were spent on trying to prove the opposite, that burning their product did not contribute to global warming. How can

such people or their governments be trusted to help prevent the catastrophe?

To sum up, the human condition at present is grim. The constant hunger, perpetual war and endless poverty, oppression and exploitation remain unrelieved and in fact appear to be getting worse. And the future holds out little hope of improvement.

Why can't the system improve the lot of humanity?

Initially it's hard to conceive that all of these wide-ranging, threats to humanity are in any way interconnected. But the wars, hunger and homelessness, the oppression, alienation and unemployment, the poverty, lack of health-care, the pollution, despoliation of nature and global warming all have a common cause. Capitalists only invest if there is profit to be made.

There is no profit to be made from people who are starving as they have no money. It is much more profitable for agribusiness to store the 'surplus' food or destroy it so that the price doesn't fall. Even in the richest countries the poor don't receive an adequate diet. So capitalism will not provide food for impoverished people and while the system exists this will remain the case.

Housing too is provided on the same profit principle, hence homelessness amongst the poor, while it is preferred to build office blocks and luxury flats on a huge scale. Similarly with pharmaceuticals and even decent, clean water is denied to large numbers of people around the world because there is no profit to be made from it. For governments too, the essential needs of ordinary people cannot be the priority while profit for their industry is paramount.

Unemployment will occur whenever capitalists can't see a way of making a profit. The disabled are not taken account of because the capitalists regard them as a drain on their finances. Racism and other oppressions are part of the capitalists' divide and rule schema and

deflects real blame from themselves. Sexism fulfils the same purpose, sells products and has the additional advantage of securing the unpaid work of raising the next generation of workers. And war is endemic to all class societies, especially capitalism, where plunder and control of others' resources is built into the system.

In every class-divided society the poor have been poor because the rich have been rich, by taking a huge slice of the surplus the poor produce. Under capitalism the wealthy underpay workers to keep their own profits up. So the connecting factor in all of these wrongs is our leaders' drive for profits and their preservation of the profit system which keeps them in power. Clearly all the things that make human life so difficult are simply the products of the normal working of capitalism.

And our leaders cannot change their behaviour. Capitalism is an unplanned system, a race for profits, with companies and countries competing with one another. The companies themselves have to make profit on pain of extinction so everything without exception must be exploited. This includes the rain forests, the earth for minerals, and the oceans for fishing, for oil extraction and as dumping grounds. Capitalists cannot afford to care about the environment or what happens to the world in the long run, because for them the priority has to be survival today. Some CEOs and board members will certainly be concerned about the despoliation of the world and what it means for their children but they cannot change their organisation's drive for profit. Any business which shows a conscience and refuses to play the capitalist game will fail. Its profits will plunge and it will falter on the stock market, the value of its shares will drop and it will be taken over by other, less scrupulous corporations. Appealing to company directors or governments to change their behaviour is futile as they simply cannot drop back in the race.



Chapter 9

Our lives under this system

Of course we ourselves, like the misfortunes that befall us, are all also products of capitalism too. We cannot imagine a society which is comprehensively cooperative, sharing and uncompetitive, even though human beings lived this way for tens of thousands of years. So most people for instance believe socialism is a nice idea but impossible to realise because of selfish human nature, without understanding that the latter comes from class-divided society in general, and from capitalism in particular.

We are all born into capitalism, and we've experienced nothing else, so it strikes us as normal, natural and unchangeable. Furthermore we've all gone through a long socialization process which includes accepting the majority of the myths "learned in soft childhood's unsuspecting hour" as the poet Shelley put it. From birth we learn concepts of this system's priorities i.e. nationhood, race, sex and sexuality, family, wealth, status and social class and how to get on in this 'perfectly normal' world. Children undergo competition at an absurdly young age in education and boys and girls still tend to be channelled, in early years, in different directions.

Most paid work demanded by capitalism is low level, dull, alienating and uninspiring and so in the interests of the system's stability, most people have to believe that this is all they are capable of. This is an abuse of humanity because when times lend themselves, 'ordinary

people' show their talents and always rise to the challenge. Everyone has hidden and potential powers of creativity, intelligence and even genius but as capitalism has little use for these they lie dormant, undeveloped and unrealised. Shelley again, writing in early capitalism understood this well when he wrote:

How many a rustic Milton has passed by stifling the speechless longings of his heart in unremitting drudgery and care.

How many a Cato has compelled his energies, no longer tameless then, to mould a pin or fabricate a nail.

How many a mighty Newton to whose passive ken those mighty spheres which gem infinity, were just bits of tinsel, stuck in heaven, to light the midnight of his native town.

Throughout life we experience constant struggle, constant anxiety and for many, if not most, constant defeat and disappointment. Our whole life's work is in the hands of others. They decide what is produced, where, when and how it's produced, and they decide these things, not on the basis of what would benefit humanity in general, but on what profit can be made. This is equally true of work in the public and service sectors, which are ultimately support systems for capitalist production. We have little control, particularly over our working lives and consequently pressures of life and work can be extreme. Of course for those without work it is far worse.

Where there are such feelings of individual powerlessness, worthlessness, failure and guilt, it is disturbing but unsurprising that some will become so bitter, frustrated and resentful that they will hit out at those even weaker than themselves. Some may become monsters, abusers and rapists. This is not to excuse such appalling crimes, but to note that they will happen repeatedly as long as we have capitalism. Given the pressures on the majority of humanity, it is extraordinary that so few sink into self-harm or abuse others and this is testament to the resilience and adaptability of human beings.



Conclusion

The system we live under is extremely new and quite extraordinary compared with any other that human beings have adopted before. Though progressive initially, it has come to act to the detriment of most human beings on Earth and of the planet itself. It cannot do away with any oppressions. It cannot adequately feed people, or clothe, educate or enrich them. It cannot avoid war, famine or pandemics. It will not end exploitation because at root it is an exploitative system. It cannot save the planet.

Nevertheless the general positives of capitalism have to be acknowledged. Firstly, it was more progressive than either feudalism or slavery, secondly it has massively developed our knowledge and our means of production and finally, and most importantly, it has given rise to the working class, its grave-digger.



PART THREE

Chapter 10

How Can We Change Things?

1

Introduction

Part 1 examined how capitalism came into the world, and Part 2 showed how it works, how it doesn't work and the resulting horrors for humanity. Today's society is violent, unequal and unjust, and poses a real threat for the future. It has to be changed, but how and by whom? Part 3 suggests solutions.

It is a perverse trait of capitalism that all of humanity's problems can be solved technically, but won't be. As long as the world is run for profit and not for human need, the violence and the misery will continue and the human condition will not fundamentally improve. It is a political problem rather than a technical one. As we've seen, even in countries that have been winning in the capitalist race and are rich, there is unemployment, homelessness, malnutrition and poverty. What hope then is there for those countries that have been impoverished and lost out in the competition?

It is true that as long as we have this system, run by the minority for their own benefit, most people will suffer under it. But it is not true that there is nothing we can do. As individuals we carry little weight, like snowflakes, but collectively, like an avalanche, we can sweep all before us. So we have to work together to change the world. But how can we achieve this not insignificant objective?

Parliament, the peaceful road to socialism

Anyone decent who wants to change society for the better, will follow what we've all been taught at school, read in the papers or seen on television, and that is, we do it peacefully, through Parliament, i.e. the

Labour Party or some other social democratic party. The vote and a democratic parliament have been hard won over the centuries in the teeth of opposition by the ruling class. We should use it.

The problem is that there have been Labour Party governments many times both in Britain and internationally and they have always failed to do anything against the rich and powerful and in favour of working people. One of the reasons is that every four or five years we vote a party into office, selected often on the basis of promises made in the run-up to the election. These promises are routinely broken and there is little we can do about it until the next election. Big business and finance on the other hand have constant contact and can influence and sway the government, and if this fails, they can apply real pressure on them.

Normally Labour/social democratic parties are brought to heel by the financial institutions. The threat of moving money abroad usually works. This causes crisis, sections of the economy to close down, unemployment, balance of payments problems and a run on the currency. In Britain a Labour government was forced to shelve plans to benefit workers in 1974 and again in 1976. The power of the ‘money men’ was revealed more recently in Greece in 2015 when Syriza was voted into office on the promise of resisting austerity. The EU, the Central Bank and the IMF combined to defeat this democratically elected government which buckled and was forced after all to impose austerity.



The State

But there are deeper reasons for the consistent failure of social democratic governments. States are thought to be neutral between the social classes and to obey parliament. However almost all the various institutions of the state are run by members of the ruling class. Such is the case with the civil service, the armed forces, the judiciary, the police, even the church and the universities. Their Heads all went to similar private schools, live in the best areas, go to the same exclusive clubs, social and sporting events, and mingle and intermarry. They are paid very highly, many times more than the average wage, as a reward for years of proving to the establishment that they are trustworthy and won't in any way rock the capitalist boat. On the contrary, they can be depended on to defend it resolutely, not least because it is of their own social class. It is inconceivable that they would harm not just their careers but their colleagues, friends and relatives in order to help the working class.

So if parliament takes steps which the rulers feel are against their interests, they resist it. Even the "mother of Parliaments", the UK government, has been defied and faced down by the forces of the state. The Curragh Mutiny in 1914 or the defeat of Prime Minister Wilson in 1974, both at the hands of the armed forces in Northern Ireland are examples of this.

Far more tragic was parliament's subordination to the state in Chile in 1973. Salvador Allende was elected president in 1970 and around the world his government was held up as the ideal illustration of the peaceful parliamentary road to socialism. But this meant his undertaking to "ride the two horses", and Allende duly tried both to alleviate the misery of the country's toilers and also to keep the capitalists happy. However, even just raising wages and nationalising some industries was far too much for the establishment, despite

Allende's attempts to placate them. The result was a brutal military coup in which Parliament was smashed, Allende died and a dictatorship installed. Pinochet's subsequent reign of terror murdered at least 30,000 of Allende's supporters and imprisoned and tortured many more. For 17 years liberals and socialists alike were imprisoned, industry re-privatised and trade unions banned. Pinochet was lauded by establishments around the world including such "democrats" as Margaret Thatcher in Britain who became a personal friend.

The lesson is, you cannot "ride the two horses" because they are going in opposite directions. Military coups against democratically elected governments have happened around the world and throughout capitalism. They attest to the fact that state machines are not neutral but act when the ruling class are threatened, and prove above all that ruling classes are not democratic.

When states first appeared with class society, their role was and still is, to reinforce and buttress minority class rule. The state's structure and its practice both abroad and at home make its bias absolutely clear. So, theory, logic and practice attest to the fact that states are simply not neutral between the classes.

Therefore the problem with trying to change things via the parliamentary road is that it doesn't work. It is based on the capitalist myths that the state is neutral, that parliament is the most powerful institution and that the Establishment is democratic. The record shows none of these to be true.



3

Other ways to change things

Solid strikes are very powerful weapons. Bosses cannot do their employees' work themselves and neither can management. If they cannot find scabs they are in real trouble. But they can resort to the law to judge the strike illegal and judges do tend to favour their own class, the employers. They can often rely on the union bureaucracy too, to hammer out a bad deal and get the workers back to work. Union bosses are not workers but an intermediate conservative layer between workers and bosses. They are paid at a considerably higher level than those they represent, are not subject to the discipline of the workplace and spend much of their time in the company of employers. They too want industrial peace and not the disruption of strikes, and they work hard to get a settlement even if it's a poor one. A bad deal doesn't affect the employment, the pay or conditions of the union official who agreed it and thus union officials can thrive under capitalism.

Trade unions themselves exist just to mitigate the conditions of the exploitation of workers, but they are not there to end that exploitation. So even successful strikes, by themselves, leave the rulers with their powers and priorities intact and more prepared for a future clash.

4

The working class?

We cannot fundamentally change the world either through the trade unions or parliament. Part 1 showed that capitalism gave rise to a massive new class, the working class and that its members were the

“grave diggers “ of capitalism. Socialists and Marxists claim that the agency of social change has to be the working class itself. One reason is its sheer size. Industrial capitalism just two centuries ago, seen only in the western fringe of Europe and the eastern fringe of the USA. now encompasses the whole world. Overwhelmingly production is for the market, and employing those who can sell little but their own ability to work is the cheapest possible method. So since the 1990s the working class has overtaken the peasantry both as the world’s largest social class, and as the largest the world has ever seen.

In any developed capitalist country, it accounts for fully 85% of the populace and the ruling class at most, 5%. The remainder comprises the old and new middle classes, which cannot form a coherent whole and therefore can only fall in behind one of the other two.

But there are further compelling reasons, other than size, for the working class to be the agency of social change. Firstly it is concentrated in all the great cities and towns of the world and secondly has immense potential power because it is located at the point of production. If they stop working, everything stops. Nothing moves on the roads, in the air, on rails or on water. Nothing is produced, transported or distributed, no profits can be made and the capitalists are powerless. Their state machine itself is paralysed because most of the people working within it are working class. In short, workers can shut down capitalism.

But thirdly and overwhelmingly this colossal social class has no interest in its own exploitation. In fact its interests are diametrically opposed to those of the capitalists. At root these struggles over the surplus value means that whatever the capitalists get the workers don’t, and whatever the workers get, the capitalists don’t. In essence the capitalists constantly want to lower their wage bill in order to increase their profits. Although most of the time these struggles are kept within bounds, occasionally clashes break out as capitalists squeeze workers too hard and working people are compelled to defend themselves.

Finally workers as a class possess most of the knowledge. They know how to make all the machines in the world, how to operate them, repair them and replace them. They have intimate knowledge of the workings of capitalism, its operations and how to bring it to a halt. They could soon learn how to run society. On the other hand, the capitalists, like the old feudal rulers, are a parasitic class that has to be carried. They have little more knowledge than how to read a balance sheet.

There have been constant battles between the exploiters and the exploited throughout history. There were huge slave revolts under the Roman Empire and others, peasant revolts in the 16th and 17th centuries, and workers under capitalism have continually resisted rulers. Under feudalism the peasants could stage huge revolts and revolutions but gained little from their victories as the surplus produced under this system was too small for everyone to benefit. Additionally once they had taken the land from the lord, the peasants argued as to how it should be divided up. They were illiterate, ignorant and had a very low cultural level but most importantly they were not a cooperative class. They couldn't form a ruling class.

Workers are altogether different. They have to be literate and numerate, are brought together in huge numbers, they cooperate every day to produce a surplus and have excellent channels of communication. Located at the point of production they have massive potential power and can run society. The first ever workers' state, the Paris Commune of 1871, promoted workers' interests just as a capitalist state promotes capitalists' interests. Thus this was the highest form of democracy since the days of hunter-gatherer society and legislation passed was highly progressive. The government representatives were paid the average worker's wage and were immediately recallable if they failed to represent their constituents. It worked, but was put down by the capitalists in a bloodbath after just 72 days.

There is a long history of workers' resistance to the capitalists, from the Chartist movement in England in the first half of the 19th century, to the Paris Commune in 1871 (see above), the great unrest 1910-1914 and the

Russian Revolution 1917 which was probably the greatest illustration of the ability of working people to run society (see later). Then there was the German revolution 1918-1823, the Hungarian revolution 1919 and the unrest in England and France at the same time. The General Strike was in 1926, the huge strikes in the USA the 1930s, the Spanish Civil war in 1936 and unrest in France in the same year. There were strikes in the USA again in 1945-46, the general strike in Austria in 1950, the international turbulence centred on France in 1968, the events in Chile in 1971 and Iran in 1979, and the Arab Spring of 2011, amongst a great many others.

And these struggles are not in vain. Western rulers make much of the difference between dictatorship and democracy. Those administering over relatively liberal democracies pride themselves for running such enlightened systems. In their countries workers have the right to protest, to publish, to congregate, march and demonstrate, the right to form a trade union and to vote. But what such rulers conveniently forget is that all of these entitlements have been won by the working class in the teeth of opposition from the ruling class themselves.



Chapter 11

Reform or Revolution

1

The fightback

If capitalists meet no resistance they push for an even bigger slice of the surplus and further limit the working classes' ability to resist them. There are great campaigns now against all the horrors of the modern world and they should and *must* be joined, encouraged and supported. Trade unions also play a vital role in defending workers against injustice both in the workplace and the wider capitalist world.

As long as the capitalists are in charge, all the problems will remain, and indeed worsen. Their priority is that they, their companies and their states must thrive and not be defeated by their competitors, and as the measure of success is their profits, it is an imperative that they exploit the workers and natural resources as much as they can. Capitalists may grant temporary reforms if pushed by sufficiently strong pressure from below, but always there is the tendency to reverse those later when the pressure eases.

Rulers are quite prepared to bully their populations and their neighbours to get what they want and there is absolutely no limit to the violence they are prepared to commit. They will turn to the fascists and support them if necessary, as they did in Italy in the early 1920s and in Germany in the early 1930s. If they were to change the way they behave, they would go under. As noted, they are a parasitic class like the feudal rulers and those of slave society. Therefore, they cannot be the ones to lead society onward to a fairer, more just world. On the contrary, they will resist any such advance if they think their profits may be threatened.

In short, they have to be removed, but of course that defines revolution. And why would anyone in their right mind choose revolution over reform? Surely much better the soft, slow, reasoned and peaceful approach to a decent society. Surely the hot-headed, sudden, violent approach invites extreme aggression from the state, is unlikely to win,

and if it did, would only lead to dictatorship and a worsening of conditions.

It is extremely difficult for the writer and reader to wrench out the deeply held myths in this 'reform not revolution' argument, in order to arrive at the truth. We are offered a long-standing, common-sense and very convincing case, that revolutions are illegitimate, unacceptable, violent and bloody and that they never succeed. Additionally, revolutions are anti-democratic, vile, odious and hateful and they throw up demagogues and dictators like Lenin and Stalin. If conditions are intolerable before a revolution, the situation afterwards will always be worse.

The case for revolution

The first thing to say in reply is that no-one can choose whether there's a revolution or not. They just happen, and they happen whether or not there are revolutionaries on the ground. Crisis conditions evolve to make the situation intolerable for the toilers and insoluble for the rulers, and people become revolutionaries in the process. Oliver Cromwell had no intention at the beginning of the English Revolution of executing the king. It is just that he and many others came to realise that it was necessary if the progressive forces were to succeed.

As a system ages, revolutions and uprisings develop and take place and with increasing frequency. Since the turn of the twentieth century there were those in Russia 1905 and 1917, Germany 1918 – 23, China 1927, Spain 1936, Hungary 1956, France 1968, Portugal in 1974, Iran 1979, Nicaragua 1979, and arguably Eastern Europe in 1989 and the Arab Spring in 2011. There have been many other lesser rebellions and insurrections, and revolutions, these like economic recessions, are products of the normal workings of capitalism. Not believing in revolution is like not believing in rainstorms. They happen.

The second point is in response to the arguments about legitimacy and success. Rulers in France, England, America and Holland all gained

their positions through successful revolution which they claimed to be legitimate. Because they resorted to revolution and overthrew their reactionary rulers, their countries have been able to develop hugely. And not one of them has produced a dictator. The alternative was to remain within the feudal shell and degenerate into a state of stagnation, hunger and decay.

As regards the arguments about violence, the violence of the oppressor to maintain control should be distinguished from that of the oppressed seeking liberation. But even a glance at these two shows the violence of our rulers to know no bounds while that of the oppressed fighting back tends to be limited. Every single day of capitalism is much more violent than a well organised takeover of power by the working class. In Russia the revolution in the capital was relatively bloodless, and effectively a strategic military manoeuvre. It is said that more died in the making of Eisenstein's film than in the actual revolution itself. Where the workers were less determined and more diffident, as in Moscow and elsewhere, the outgoing regime had the chance to fight back, escalating any violence to the extreme.

The moral position for workers regarding the use of force is the same as if they were locked in a room with a ravenous beast. They could just do nothing and be peaceful but that would lead to violence as it devours them one after another. The sensible thing to do to avoid bloodshed would be for some to distract the beast while others knock it out or overcome it in some other way, undoubtedly an act of violence. But then it can be dealt with appropriately to make the situation safe.

Talk from our rulers about the morality of violence is the height of hypocrisy. They will employ any amount of violence against workers here or abroad in pursuit of their interests, but will envelop it in a myth of high morality. They will invade, smash, bomb, torture and slaughter on a mass scale, but will always "morally" oppose violence when used by us against them. The First World War, as we've seen, a result of capitalism, sacrificed around 40 million lives as opposed to possibly 2 million in all the great revolutions, the French, English, American, the

Dutch and the Russian put together. But a historical omission by the rulers, as deliberate as their myth-making, is that actually, it was revolution, in Russia and Germany, which ended the First World War and put a stop to all the carnage.

But perhaps the most important thing about revolutions is that they are the only portals, to a better world, a decent, fair, democratic world where all can share.

Chapter 12

The Russian Revolution

The triumph of workers' power

Our establishment needs us to believe the myth that only they have the ability to run society. We, the ordinary people have to believe that we are incapable, and that without them there would be mob rule and chaos. They don't want us to know that the Russian Revolution, like the Paris Commune before it, not only exposed all their myths about revolutions being violent, anti-democratic and mindless, but also showed unequivocally that the working class can run society themselves, and in fact, run it better.

Workers proceeded to set up a higher, more complete democracy than ever capitalism can claim. Parliamentary representatives were paid at the average worker's wage and were immediately recallable if they failed to implement the democratic decisions of those they represented.

Legislation passed was incomparably more progressive than any before or since. Women immediately gained the right to abortion on demand, divorce, equality with men, and the vote. LGBT+ rights were established, homosexuality was decriminalised and gay marriage legalised. Anti-Semitism, which had been rife in Russia was rolled right back as was all racism and religious oppression. The old empire

was ended as the workers voted to hand independence to former colonies and to pull the country out of the imperialist slaughter of the First World War. And it is all the more remarkable that all this radical legislation was passed during war and civil war as foreign armies invaded Russia and the old order at home fought back brutally to restore their rule.

The revolution relied on the active and informed involvement of ordinary people, and they voted for and acted upon what was in their class interest. The latter of course is the diametric opposite of that of the capitalists. They do not want the informed involvement of the people and for them the priority is profits for the few before anything. For workers it is the human need of the overwhelming majority before anything.

Ordinary people, who had been kept down and made to feel worthless, had risen up and taken power themselves in this “festival of the oppressed and exploited”. They were eager to learn about economics, politics, philosophy and the classics in this atmosphere of freedom, and after 1917 there was a flourishing of art, literature and culture. The workers had “stormed heaven”, liberated themselves and could feel their strength and abilities. Aware of how they had been oppressed, undermined and kept ignorant, they had a thirst for knowledge.

Capitalist myth has it that today fundamental change is impossible and that human nature ensures that racism, sexism, war and inequality are inevitable. We are told that workers can’t run things themselves. The documented experience of the Russian Revolution disproves all this.



How workers’ power was lost

Russia was underdeveloped, still largely a feudal country and the peasantry vastly outnumbered the workers. Peasants want their own individual land and largely can live with capitalism by producing for the market, so if Russia remained isolated, the workers would inevitably be overwhelmed. Revolution in more advanced countries was absolutely necessary to come to their aid. This needed to be in countries like Germany, France, Britain and the USA where the workers themselves were the vast majority. But although there was class struggle in all of these, only Germany achieved a full-scale revolution, and even here, through error and inexperience, the revolution was lost.

This left the Russian workers in the worst position possible, isolated in a capitalist world where the international revolutionary wave was on the wane. Despite defeating fourteen invading armies, the revolution still had to fight for its life. After war, invasion and civil war, Russia was broken and the working class ceased to exist as they took up positions in the army or drifted to the countryside looking for food. The factories had been cannibalised for other uses, output was a fraction of that of five years earlier and the Bolshevik Party had to substitute for the class. Russia had sacrificed itself for international workers revolution. When this failed to materialise, Stalin and the Russian bureaucracy betrayed the revolution and the endeavour of international workers power, and in 1928 joined the capitalist race.

All the radical legislation was immediately reversed, religious, racial and sexual oppression was reinstated, workers and peasants were ruthlessly exploited and Russia became once again, “the jailhouse of nations”. All the horrors of early capitalism, the slavery, the empire building and the racism which had evolved over three hundred years for a country like Britain, were now to be condensed into thirty for Russia as it industrialised at break-neck speed to compete with the west.

All this was in the interests of the new rulers, the bureaucracy, and it is another prevailing capitalist myth that Stalin’s Russia was an alternative system to capitalism. From the start it was a form of capitalism itself, state capitalism. And the test of this was that workers in Russia were in

exactly the same position as workers elsewhere in capitalism, that is, exploited, oppressed and bullied by their bosses. It was symbiotically in the interests of both the Russian rulers and those in the west to pretend that Russia, that had become a monstrous despotism, was “socialism”, the alternative to capitalism.

And if the test of workers’ exploitation won’t suffice to prove the capitalist nature of Russia after 1928, its foreign policy until its death in 1989 certainly will. Throughout those years, workers abroad were sacrificed to Russian foreign policy in the name of the Communist Party. The long list of betrayals includes the British general strike of 1926, the Chinese revolution of 1927, both the Spanish Civil War and the French events in 1936, East Germany 1953, Hungary 1956, Iraq 1963, Indonesia 1965, Czechoslovakia 1968, France again 1968, Italy 1969, and Chile 1973.



Conclusion

A glance at all the historical ways that humans have organised ourselves shows capitalism to be the latest, most fleeting, least stable, least rational and the most violent and devastating both to the planet and to humanity. Newly born, like a gadfly it buzzes haphazardly around crashing into its environment and then ages and expires in a day. Capitalism, though new, already shows all the signs and symptoms of degeneration and will soon die.

Everything in the universe comes into existence, survives for a while and then ends. This includes the stars, the galaxies and planets and the mountains, seas and continents. Thus also hunter-gatherer society, slavery and feudalism, in turn and everything except, according to Establishment myth, capitalism. This we're told has been around for millennia and will last forever.

No, it will end, but the question is how? Left to itself, like the beast in the room, it seems highly probable it will continue to attack and kill us. Oppression, inequality, injustice, famine and slump are endemic to capitalism. So are war, starvation and disease, and all of these will be repeated over and over again without end as long as we live under capitalism.

It is more than probable the system will continue to pollute the air, land and sea, persist in global warming and eventually make human life on Earth impossible. It is also probable that sooner or later those massive and growing nuclear arms stockpiles will be deployed. In other words, unless we're very careful, capitalism could end bringing humanity down with it.

The alternative is that the biggest and most powerful social class ever, the working class, comes to reject the myths of capitalism through its struggles and realises that capitalism, like feudalism before it, cannot be reformed but must be rejected entirely and overthrown.

And this class can permanently change things for the better because the material basis for capitalism no longer exists. Class society arose because the surplus humans were able to produce was small and therefore only a limited number of people could benefit from it. Now the surplus is massive and everyone on the planet can have a decent diet, home and standard of living and can gain.

So all the evidence shows that socialism is necessary for humanity to progress and to thrive. The only thing preventing it is the capitalists themselves. Not only are they so proficient at peddling the myths to us,

they also hold their own conviction that the myths are true. Their world view is that this current system is the best of all, that it is the high point of civilisation, normal, natural and god-given and that society needs them to run it. Any move against them they see as madness. Therefore, they are supremely sensitive to threats to their own interests and will fight back mercilessly using their state, the police, the fascists and the military.

But, in its size, literacy and cohesion, and its concentration in cities and at the point of production, the working class can sweep away the capitalists far more easily than they themselves could overcome the feudal rulers. And when that happens, humanity can develop further and go forward into a more rational and civilized future. Time and again we have seen the phenomenal power of workers, far surpassing that of the capitalists and pushing them aside. All those events, in Russia 1917, parts of Germany 1918-1923, Spain 1936, Portugal 1973, Chile 1973 and Iran 1979 are fine examples.

But despite these the world has remained in the grip of capitalism. And the key is that unless workers actually take power themselves and actively prevent the capitalists reorganising, then come the bloodbaths. Capitalism will retaliate if stung by just a strike or demonstration. But, badly scared by an uprising, they will take brutal action to ensure that it never occurs again. This happened most starkly at the end of the Paris Commune in 1871, after the German Revolution 1919 and 1923, again in Chile in 1973, in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and in Egypt in 2013.

How can workers avoid this violence? We've already seen the analogy of people locked up in a room with a wild beast. A quick, wholehearted effort to overcome it results in a minimum of violence. The reformist alternative, based on myth, says the best way to deal with the problem is to gently pull out first one claw and then another so that it doesn't notice it, then to set about its teeth. Unfortunately both the beast, and our rulers are highly sensitive to anything which mitigates against their interests. And both will take severe, uncompromising action.

In all the many revolutions that have taken place, in only one were the working class able to sweep away the capitalists and their state, and run society themselves. The Russian Revolution from October 1917 lasted just long enough to demonstrate what wonderful possibilities there are, before it was snuffed out by capitalism only a few years later. And it wasn't random chance that it happened in Russia. Workers could seize state power there and failed elsewhere simply because the working class was sufficiently organised. It could act clearly and decisively in its own interest because it had a party at its head. In every other revolution the might of the workers was evident and could have overcome the capitalists, but the cohesion to take state power simply wasn't there. Neither was the clarity to take the necessary measures against counter-revolution and the almost inevitable bloodshed.

* * *

Revolutionary parties have been present in some of the many revolutions that have inevitably sprung up under capitalism. Some have been too small to have an influence as in Iran and Egypt. Numbers were Communist Parties taking their orders from Moscow, now no longer interested in workers' power. Or as in the German case, they were too new and inexperienced and made crucial mistakes.

The working class has to build its own organisation with deep roots in the class and be cohesive and experienced. That requires building the revolutionary party years before the revolution, when revolution is unthinkable. And so, if there is any conclusion to draw here it is this. The revolutionary party has to be built, under capitalism in pre-revolutionary times. That means now.

The authors are members of the Socialist Workers Party

Background Material

- 1) E. H. Carr and Engels on early society, ST Croix on Greece and Rome, Christopher Hill on the English Revolution, and so on. But the best overarching history including all of these is **A People's History of the World** by Chris Harman, Bookmarks Publications, 1999.
- 2) Paul McGarr gives an admirable description of the French revolution in the **International Socialism Journal** 43, 1989.
- 3) The greatest account of the Russian Revolution is given by Leon Trotsky in his three-volume work, **The History of the Russian Revolution**.
- 4) Marx did not give a complete theory of the boom-slump cycle but left many clues for later writers to do so. Perhaps the earliest attempt was by Pavel V. Maksakovski in *The Capitalist Cycle* published posthumously in 1929. Brill Historical Materialism book series, 2004. Chris Harman gives a very readable account of economic crises in **Economics of the Madhouse** Bookmarks Publications, 1997, and also a wider application of economic theory in **Zombie Capitalism** Bookmarks Publications, 2009.
- 5) A Marxist account of imperialism in the modern world is given in **Imperialism and Resistance** John Rees, Routledge, 2006 and in **China and Imperialism in the 21st Century**, Adrian Budd, *International Socialism Journal* 170, 2021.
- 6) A thorough examination of the police is provided by Audrey Farrell in **Crime, Class and Corruption: Politics of the Police** Socialist Worker, 1995.
- 7) **Pride, Politics and Protest** Laura Miles et al, Socialist Worker, 2021
- 8) **Sexism and the System: A Rebel's Guide to Women's Liberation** Judith Orr, Bookmarks Publications, 2007.
- 9) **Say It Loud: Marxism and the Fight Against Racism** Ed Brian Richardson, Bookmarks Publications, 2013
- 10) **Capitalism and the Politics of Food** Amy Leather, Socialist Worker, 2021
- 11) **System Change not Climate Change** Ed Martin Empson, Bookmarks Publications, 2019.

