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For over a century now Republicans and Democrats have been inviting workers to play a political shell game called, "Pick me to represent you and your interests will be served." Let us now see how we fare in this game of selecting political leaders to cope with our concerns.

## Housing and Food

The past few decades have not only witnessed escalating prices for lower quality housing, but also a spiraling increase in the number of homeless people. Estimates range from around 200,000 to two million. What is undisputed, though, is that it has undoubtedly at least doubled in the last thirty years. As is so often the case with capitalism, just when homelessness increases, jobs in the housing construction industry decrease. In other words, as the real human need for housing has been on the rise, capitalism's ability to produce housing has been on the decline. All the FHA loans, HUD housing, homeowner tax breaks (first time or whatever) have proven futile in reversing this trend. There are more homeless people now than ever.

Another basic real human need is food. Less is being produced for a higher cost. During Reagan's first term, Edwin Meese's Commission on Hunger in America reported that around "20 million Americans suffer from some form of malnutrition." That is rather startling when you consider that at the same time this report was commissioned, a horrible famine was wracking Ethiopia, whose entire population was (then) under 20 million. More people were affected by malnutrition in the United States (the world's largest food producer) than in the most desperately famine-plagued African nation. At the same time, farm foreclosures in the U.S. were escalating, shutting down more and more food producers all the while that world hunger rose. All the farm subsidies,

Condensed and adapted  
from a longer version  
given as a talk.

HA!

WASTED YOUR VOTE AGAIN

— DIDN'T  
YOU?



food-stamps, agricultural import/export deregulations have also proven unable to reverse that deadly overall trend. The sad fact is that globally over 10,000 people a day die of malnutrition and related diseases while food rots in storage, unable to be sold (no doubt), and agricultural production potential is deliberately restricted.

Even though you personally may not now be homeless or malnourished, you know what will happen if you don't pay your rent, mortgage or property tax: you will become homeless. A constant threat hangs over our heads. Insecurity is the only certainty of our futures under capitalism.

## Festering frustrations

Whether it be crime, health care, homelessness, malnutrition, pollution or you name it, none of these problems has been solved. Their overall incidence has only escalated. A sense of failure and frustration with the two major political parties has become so pervasive it has even begun to force its way onto the agendas of some high-profile members of

these parties who hit the campaign trail from one election to the next (e.g., Jerry Brown and Pat Buchanan).

An inescapable conflict stands between the needs of capital accumulation and the needs of human beings. None of the candidates will ever tell you this, and no other political party—

Continued on next page

from the conventional to the self-described “revolutionary”—will advocate anything but another variant of capital accumulation. Every political party that has ever taken the stage has been out to run capitalism. Some candidates for office, despite sincere efforts to be “people’s progressives” on a crusade against oppression and poverty, come off sounding like fascists—like Milwaukee city alderman and one-time Black Panther Michael McGee a couple of years ago, who threatened to launch guerrilla warfare and general chaos if he weren’t elected. But once people who really care about human suffering have given in to the notion that capitalism is all there is or ever will be, you can understand why they may conclude violence works.

### Second-rate existence

There are two major reasons why both Republicans and Democrats have failed to address adequately the very real desire for a decent standard of living, a decent world to live in; why they continue leaving us shackled to a second-rate existence.

In the first place, both major parties honestly believe they can enact policies or programs that will exert a positive influence on North American capitalism (more commonly known as “the economy”) so it will genuinely meet our needs as human beings. An *Atlanta Journal* clipping dated 2/7/92 shows joblessness for that year as having remained stuck at a five-year high. At least two and a half million more people were unemployed then than when the “recession” first began in July 1990; unemployment was at its worst level since the infamous year of 1984. No incumbent in any party would prefer to run for re-election with a record like that. The mere fact that George Bush took his lumps shows the futility of attempts by either major party to influence the economy through their respective policies and turns in office. If they could, they would.

They can’t. Things would never be in

such a mess, then or any other time, if the politicians could control the course of economic trends. Their political careers are on the line at election time. None of them wanted a five-year high in unemployment in the last election, but they couldn’t help it. It was beyond their control.

If the politicians could, for example, whip a recession by reducing the Federal Reserve’s interest rate (as they would have us believe they can), why would they let a recession happen in the first place? The obvious fact is, there is no direct correlation whatever between the Federal Reserve Rate and prosperity. If there were, then when things started to slow down, the Federal Reserve would only have to lower that rate and we would always have a robust, prosperous

**There is no mastering the effects of capital accumulation. It leads all leaders and dictates to all dictators.**

economy.

Government spending is another tool said to affect the economy. According to the dogma followed by every American president since Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the federal government should in times of rising unemployment increase spending to remedy the situation, and in times of rising inflation government should decrease spending to remedy that situation. The problem is, when both unemployment and inflation rise simultaneously, you can’t simultaneously increase and decrease government spending. In reality government spending to control economic trends has a merely incidental effect, if any at all. During the Reagan administration the inflation rate went down all the while that the federal government was doing the highest deficit spending in U.S. history.

### Boom-and-bust cycle

Karl Marx correctly analyzed in *Capital* over a century ago what happens under capitalism, and his analysis still holds up today. Capitalism operates on a boom-and-bust cycle, and nothing will ever alter that—no interest rate jiggling, government spending, tax breaks or whatever: not even jiggling on a grand scale, as in Russia and Eastern Europe in this century.

There is no mastering the effects of capital accumulation. It leads all leaders and dictates to all dictators. Capitalism has inherent contradictions that defy all attempts to consciously channel it. We didn’t have problems of the proportions that we now have when the system’s productive infrastructure wasn’t nearly as dynamic as it is now. Capitalism created these inhuman conditions and cannot rid itself of them.

### Ignorance or deceit

That is also why Republicans and Democrats alike are being either incredibly ignorant or deceitful when they say they have an economic policy that is going to change capitalism’s fundamental tendencies. For over a century workers have believed them, and for over a century human misery has only escalated.

The second reason for the failure of the major parties concerns whom they benefit. When we elect them to office, whose interest do they really serve? An especially ignorant racist view of political interest seems to be making the rounds these days. On the one extreme, some “progressives” believe government is working in collusion with private industry to monopolize the nation’s wealth for the benefit of the “white race,” and this collusion is viewed as the “white power structure.”

And what do we actually find? A Census Bureau report published in *USA Today* (2/2/92) shows that between 1969 and 1989, poverty among whites increased by a larger percentage (slightly over four, to be exact) than among blacks (which increased by slightly over one percent) over that same 20-year period.

And it is well known that in actual numbers there are more impoverished whites than there are blacks. The “middle class” of white workers declined by eight percent, while for blacks it was slightly less than three percent. If the “white race” is colluding to monopolize wealth with its “power structure,” it is doing a pretty dismal job of it.

From the other extreme, a “minority lynch mob” (comprised mainly—and ironically—of blacks) has purportedly seized control of the government to redirect other people’s hard-earned wealth to these minorities. The same Census report just cited shows that, percentage-wise, poverty is highest among blacks (43.9 percent), and among “middle-class” whites it is lowest (51.5 percent). You would think that if in fact a “lynch mob” had infiltrated the government to plunder wealth on behalf of the “black race” they could have done a little better than to ensure that blacks would be more likely to be poor and less likely to meet the national average in terms of income and standard of living.

If neither the “white race” nor the “black race” benefits from the policies of those who claim to represent us in the government, then who does? Who is really getting ahead in this system? A statistic compiled by the Internal Revenue Service and published in *Greenpeace* magazine shows that in 1976 the richest one percent of the U.S. population owned 19.2 percent of the country’s wealth; in 1988 that same richest one percent owned 36 percent (Jan/Feb 92).

### Should we be stupefied?

And there is your “power structure.” There’s your “minority lynch mob” controlling the government: the capitalist class! This whole setup is geared to benefit them. And it is the function of both the Republican and Democratic political parties to stupefy us into supporting the interests of the capitalist class. Lee Iacocca, CEO of Chrysler Corporation, will earn over four million dollars this year because people like us do all the work for him, producing, selling and buying his automobiles as he sits in his office

*The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy, and bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea and is expressed as an “eternal law.”\**



*Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.\*\**

\*Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*. \*\*Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

thanking us for the millions.

We, the members of the working class, must go to work almost every day (if we can find it); we sell our mental and physical energies for a wage or salary; we collectively produce everything and contribute everything to an enhanced human existence; and we must settle for the second-rate things in life. We are the wage-slaves of the capitalist class. It is our support of this social contract that hinders and in most cases makes impossible the fulfillment of our individual dreams and human aspirations.

And that is ultimately why the Republicans and Democrats fail the test. To garner success in life we must opt for what is in our interest: not a class society where things are produced for the sake of capital accumulation by a minority (capitalism), but a classless society where things are produced for use and all of society controls it (socialism).

### The end of the working class

Houses will be built to live in, food grown to eat—is that so bizarre or impossible? With democratic control of the earth’s resources and productive forces, things will not be built on the basis of how much money goes into them but how many votes go into them. The system of buying and selling will vanish with the master class who used it to control us. We will finally be free, for we will have free access to all that is produced. Having liberated itself, the working class will cease to exist; though work as we know it will continue on a voluntary, enjoyable, needs-oriented basis—it will cease to be the coercive, profit-oriented drudgery it now is.

Such a world will come about when an overwhelming majority of the population elects socialists to all levels of government to dismantle the system, thus preventing the capitalist class from continuing its control of the earth’s resources

## TEMPORARY INSANITY

“You’d better get used to it,” the headline tells us (*Boston Globe*, 11/2/94). What is “it”? Why, “the temping of America,” of course! The by now endless waves of corporate downsizing have found a ready-made holding tank for all the new surplus people: the temp industry. (Many of the other surplus people have either failed to make their way into the tank or have washed down its sides to an unknown place called Homelessness.)

The companies themselves, of course, are merely rethinking their business plans as the average rate of profit continues to sink—only this time, the world’s markets stand poised on the threshold of another major expansion, and it would be “uncompetitive” to dither around with such unimaginative concepts as “full employment” or “structural unemployment.” So flexibility has become the watchword among entrepreneurs and investors.

It joins a long line of jerry-built clichés turned out by business ideologues like John Case, a senior writer at *Inc. Magazine* and author of the above-referenced *Globe* article. “Temp work is rarely a picnic,” he comments with droll understatement. “Most temps do make less than regular workers. Many get fewer benefits—although more and more temp firms are offering perks such as paid vacations and shared-cost health insurance.” And just to show you that real men actually do temp, he adds: “temping isn’t to everyone’s liking.”

Temp agencies do like to market the temp-concept as an exciting opportunity to play the field; the right agency can even sell you some glamor into the bargain. But temp work is mostly the same old drudgery at best—with an added element of insecurity and unpredictability that make even the cheerless boredom of full-time employment seem like fun. As a senior writer, Case is perhaps unaware that the perks he mentions so glibly are only accessible (when you can get them) to those working a minimum number of hours with the same agency. The threshold is set so high only a small proportion of temp workers can actually manage to



cross it; those who don’t can go fish.

With an Alzheimer’s-like wave of his wand, Case tells his readers that “no part of the job market is a walk in the park these days.” He probably grew up blissfully unaware that workers and capitalists have always thrown bricks at each other. Class struggle is a chronic feature of class-divided societies. The mere fact that “companies are always looking to cut costs” has nothing but ugly implications for certain unfortunates in not only “today’s” but also in yesterday’s and tomorrow’s labor market. Similarly with his notion that it is only “today’s business world” that is volatile and unforgiving. People never bothered themselves overmuch *then* if you lost your job; now they throw in a little jeering to boot. In very few parts of this world created by capital in its own image has capital ever seen fit to spread the risks of becoming surplus to its labor requirements.

Case concludes his manly sermonizing by citing another member of the temp industry’s College of Cardinals, John Chuang (president of MacTemps): temping teaches workers “to rely on their skills and marketability, rather than on the beneficence of some employer.” That, Case figures, “is a lesson we all could stand to learn.”

Sure! All of us—except those of us sitting pretty up there at the top, raking in the dough (theirs) from all the blood, sweat and tears (ours) getting shed in this “temporarily insane” phase of capitalist development. Maybe the lesson we should be learning is that capitalism is a four-letter word our children shouldn’t

suffer any longer having to learn. Or better still, that a world of moneyless free access to all the goods and services we need beats the f— out of this slavery we call working for a living.

## LET US BE THE JUDGE

Although political and other leaders are manifestly unable to steer the capitalist tiger toward any destination of choice, come time for (re-)election, they will always claim, if the tiger was a good boy and didn’t eat anyone along the way, that it was they who pointed it in the right direction. If the tiger ran amok or took the wrong turn, it must have been following someone else’s advice. And the reverse is true for their opponents!

Could you, for example, tell the difference between Senator Edward Kennedy (a Democrat from Massachusetts and a man well liked by organized labor) and William Weld (the governor of Massachusetts and a man well liked by big business), just from their campaign statements?

Which one said: “The economy is not just doing better...it’s doing well”? And who said, “Massachusetts is solidly on the road to recovery”? [*Boston Globe*, 11/2/94]. If you guessed Kennedy and Weld in that order, you were *wrong*. Likewise, their respective opponents both paint a scenario of gloom and despair merely for the purpose of getting elected—despite the minor inconvenience that they belong to opposing political parties. When asked whether their critiques conflicted with party loyalty, they both engaged in what the writer of the *Globe* article termed “delicate hair-splitting.”

The only remarkable thing about all this is workers’ pathetic patience with these lying, cynical (and in this case, rich) toadies who stoop to ask them for a vote once every few years. “Analysts” see it in each politician’s interest to treat the issues of capitalism as an opportunity for a sales pitch.

“If people’s pocketbooks are full, they’re going to vote for more of the same,” said David Wyss, research direc-

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# On reinventing a square wheel

Organized labor has fallen on somber times in the “global village.”

Capital’s erosion of working-class gains since the Great Depression has succeeded to the point where workers organized in unions now represent scarcely more than a tenth of the U.S. work force. This has been made possible partly by capitalism’s global expansion, which by the 1980s had effectively proletarianized the bulk of the world’s population; multinational capitalists have redesigned the way they invest their capital, maximizing their ability to shift it cheaply and efficiently to whatever part of the planet promises them the highest possible profit.

## Global job combat

It is not hard for capital to sack workers and break unions in the U.S., with huge numbers of unemployed or underemployed workers entering the emerging labor forces of competitor economies in Asia, Latin America and Africa. As in previous periods of “primitive accumulation,” the servants of capital have engineered barbaric new forms of repression there to ensure that the path to anticipated profits would be smooth.

By the beginning of the 90s organized labor in the U.S. had been reduced to the status of a “pressure group within the Democratic Party” run by salaried officials having a vested interest in maintaining their professional niche—even to the detriment of their own organizations (according to a

1994 pamphlet put out by the Trotskyist group, Solidarity).<sup>1</sup>

Against this backdrop, a union-based organizing committee calling itself the Labor Party Advocates (LPA) has stepped forward with a drive to generate support for the creation of a latter-day U.S. version of a Labor Party:

**LPA represents a strategy to break out of the box we’ve been in. We hope you will consider joining with several thousand other trade unionists at every level of the Labor Movement who have committed to this new strategy and are determined to create a political party that speaks for us for a change.”** [Emphasis in the original]<sup>2</sup>

LPA is laying its foundations carefully before proceeding to any very visible efforts to mobilize what polls show to be a “deep disillusionment with the Democratic Party” among workers.<sup>3</sup> The LPA’s thesis, as Nader sees it, is that the Democrats have fallen from grace and have degenerated into a “self-perpetuating club of politicians” who seek only to feather their political nests. This varies somewhat, as you might expect, from the above-cited Solidarity pamphlet’s view: Solidarity “argue[s] against participation in the Democratic or Republican parties and promote[s] the idea of an independent political party in which the agenda is set by the membership.”

## Democratic control

For Solidarity, “socialism is first and foremost democratic control by the working class”—rather than both common ownership *and* democratic control by society—so it is not surpris-

ing they should frame the question of forming a Labor Party as merely a device for breaking capitalism of its worst habits. (A fundraiser ad for the “Eugene V. Debs Five Score Club Card” in *Labor Party Advocate* [Sept. 1994] announces that Debs “stood for a vibrant trade union movement with a political party organized by and for the American worker.”)

The question, however, that workers never seem to ask themselves when they discuss organizing is, what can you really do within the boundaries of capitalism that the system can’t ultimately turn to its advantage? Capitalism will never stop changing, and resisting capital will always be the number one priority for labor organizations. The role of unions will always be defensive.

## Looking-glass names

LPA supporters probably do speak for most workers in believing a Labor Party would signify “a big group of common people making a plan together for the future.” But the whole concept of a “Party of Labor” makes about as much sense as would something calling itself “The Capitalist Party.” Once you get past the looking-glass names political parties usually give themselves, the vast majority of them actually are just organizations whose purpose is to coordinate, negotiate or “allow” capital accumulation.

“Labor” parties cannot manage the accumulation of capital to anyone’s advantage but a capitalist’s. Capital has to view everything through the spectacles of profit. Many people seem to believe society can humanize capitalism by inducing capitalists to arrange wealth production chiefly to meet people’s needs, relying only secondarily on the profit motive.

This is nothing if not a counsel of despair, since—if people really did come first in this world we have suffered to be created for us—society would have no use for such a narrow and irrational mechanism as the profit motive. Humanly speaking, our world does not require being divided up into the competing (and authoritarian) monopolies of human social production we call “enterprises.”

Sooner or later a labor party must either separate into hierarchical layers with conflicting interests, or else become eclipsed by or absorbed into the parties of capital. The record shows that, thus far in world history, no Labor Party—neither Britain’s nor Israel’s, nor their equivalents (e.g., Canada’s NDP, Germany’s SPD, the former Soviet Union’s “Communist” Party)—has managed to avoid the fate of turning on its own constituency and settling down, at best, to the comfortable decadence of an opposition party defending the interests of capital against those of the working class. LPA is already evincing a breathtaking disinterest in the lessons of the past—and showing a dogged determination to repeat exactly the same errors.

## Capitalist virus

As workers we all need to ask ourselves whether capitalism really has anything left to offer us. We need to think instead about establishing in its place a moneyless world commonwealth in which we no longer have an interest in bombing, shooting, executing, torturing, terrorizing or victimizing each other—all at the behest of a nest of cynical parasites whose favorite sport is to divide us into warring factions. What we need is to eliminate the virus of capital, not play medic and race around scavenging for political, social and economic band-aids.

# Too many people— or not enough profit?

The following article, with some very minor edits, was originally written as a letter to The Star newspaper (Johannesburg, South Africa). —Ed. Committee.

Your features on demography, “Poor, powerless, pregnant” and “Defusing the people bomb,” produced one sensible fact. “Research has proved that population growth can be controlled successfully only if the standard of living... can be improved....” Actually, the improvement in the standard of living promotes a declining birth rate, as in Western Europe, with no controlling agency. The sun rises and sets without help of astronomers!

To say that millions of human beings suffer from hunger because there are too many people is to propagate a myth which is debunked by an examination of relevant facts. The continued existence of millions living under the scourge of hunger, malnutrition and outright starvation is neither natural nor unavoidable but is absolutely artificial.

## Mass poverty

The so-called population problem is really an expression of mass poverty, the unavoidable product of the market system, i.e., capitalism, whether managed by the state or monopolized multinationally and privately. Governments are pressured to fund relief schemes, which they do with varying degrees of alacrity or reluctance. But still the situation stays or wors-



**YES, IT'S A MISTAKE:** “Overpopulation” is just business slang for “the poverty of the majority.” The capitalist class needs to view the real world through the inverted mirror of profit to “understand” it. Capital sees workers as so many cattle—until it has to pay to feed, clothe and shelter them.

ens. Consider, however, what Tom Clausen, President of the World Bank, said in 1982:

[The World Bank was] not in the business of redistributing wealth from one set of countries to another. It is not the Robin Hood of the international financial set. (*Food, Poverty and Power*, 1982, Anne Buchanan, p. 68)

Blaming the victims, the poor, for their poverty dehumanizes them; they become “hordes,” “cancerous growths,” “plagues of people,”

etc. This patronizing attitude of neo-Malthusianism condemns the poorest of the poor to death, as hapless victims unable to do anything for themselves, or as Paul Ehrlich wrote: “The battle to feed humanity is already lost.” (*The Population Bomb*, 1971, p. 15)

## Horrible pessimism

The facts, however, refute this horrible pessimism.

1. World population is about 5,500 million.

2. The US President’s Science Advisory Council estimates 450 to 500 million of them are hungry. The World Bank, using different criteria, reckons 730 million, 340 million of whom have diets insufficient to prevent serious risk to health and that result in arrested mental development and stunted growth. Could the hungry be fed?

3. Current world food production is about 3,800 million metric tons. By weight, about half is grain. This amounts to five pounds of food per day, if equitably distributed, for every man, woman and child on this planet.

4. The UN’s Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) shows that this food represents 2,709 calories per head per day and 71 grams of protein per head per day (*United Nations Statistical Yearbook*, 37th edition, 1993, Table 24, p. 17). On average, human beings need between 1,800 and 2,500 calories a day, and 45 to 50 grams of protein for body growth and repair. So current food production would be adequate to feed the (projected) world population for the year 2100!

## 67 poorest countries

In the mid-1980s the U.S. Department of Agriculture calculated, on actual nutritional needs, that the 67 poorest countries—with the lowest income per head of population—required 25.8 million metric tons of food to meet their needs. (The FAO esti-

mated needs at 20 million metric tons.) The 1984-85 global cereal “carry-over” was 294 million metric tons, not counting the butter, beef, milk powder, etc., kept in storage because the market could not profitably absorb this so-called surplus. The UK alone spent £1,570 million per year to keep its share of this off the market.

These figures take no account of fertile land withdrawn from production in the effort to keep up prices and profits. In this connection, ponder what the agricultural economist Colin Clark revealed in the early 1970s: “World resources of agricultural land could feed 47,000 million people at maximum standards.” (*Population and Land Use*, 2nd edition, p. 153)\*

### Starved for a profit

So why do millions of us fellow humans continue to starve?

First, it must be recognized and restated, obvious though undoubtedly it is, that food is not produced primarily to satisfy human need—but for sale on the market so as to realize a profit. No profit—no production. The market recognizes only effective demand, i.e., demand backed by cash to pay for it; people starve within sight of food.

As Keith Griffith, President of Magdalen College, Oxford, wrote:

The fundamental cause of hunger is the poverty of specific groups of people, not a general shortage of food. In simple terms, what distinguishes the poor from others is that they do not have sufficient purchasing power or effective demand to enable them to acquire enough to eat. The problem is the relationship of particular groups of people to food, not food itself. (*World Hunger and the World Economy*, 1987, p. 18)

That academic assessment is backed by the findings of aid charities in the field. War on Want’s Don Thomson reported:

Experienced disaster-aid officials now admit...that they know of hardly any famine in living memory where there has been an outright shortage of food locally. They found instead that the victims did not have the means to buy. (*New Scientist*, 11/7/74)

In a buying-and-selling world, an abundant harvest need not mean food for the hungry. A case in point is Mozambique, where up to 4 million people were facing

starvation largely because the country’s agricultural production had been wrecked by years of civil war. But in neighboring Zimbabwe, in 1987, there was a 2.8-million ton maize “mountain.” A stack of white maize, three storeys high, stood alongside the railway linking Zimbabwe and Mozambique—55 miles away! The food would have met Mozambique’s needs for several years, but as Pat Henderson, chief executive of the Zimbabwe Commercial Grain Producers Association, said at the time: “It’s not only a human problem; it’s a financial problem. We cannot give our maize

**The so-called population problem is really an expression of mass poverty, the unavoidable product of the market system.**

tor for DRI/McGraw Hill, a Lexington economic forecasting firm:

It’s in Weld’s interest to say it’s full at the state level, and Kennedy’s to say it’s full at the national level. It is in Romney’s and Roosevelt’s interest to say that voter’s pocketbooks are not as full as they appear [*Boston Globe*, 11/2/94].

Meanwhile, “many voters are nervous about the future and searching for a way to express the fact at the polls next week.” All right: so it’s a difficult economy, and the working class is confused over who it thinks represents its interests (Democratic senator, Republican governor). A working class that knew just what it was about would, as a first step, cease to concern itself with the whole project of seeking ways to fix or palliate the system.

Only the most brain-dead kind of realism can keep the majority wallowing in its own confusion this way. What should really be making us nervous, though, is

away.” (*Observer*, 2/15/87)

### Commercial madness

Henderson was right! It is commercial madness to give free access to food—in a money economy. *The human problem of hunger cannot be solved within the society based on production for profit.*

The explanation of the fecundity of the poorest people in the world is given by Josue de Castro—the great Brazilian biologist and first of the FAO—in his *Geography of Hunger*:

It is known that there is a direct connection between the functioning of the liver and the ovaries; the role of the liver being to inactivate the excess oestrogens which the ovaries throw into the bloodstream. Fatty degeneration of the liver and the tendency to cirrhosis are...some of the characteristic results of protein deficiency.... The result is a marked increase in the woman’s reproductive capacity.... It is high time to challenge a point of view which, inspired by economic or political interest, regards as a natural human condition what is in fact the result of social factors. (p 140)

### Moneyless abundance

Of course, capitalism—the market system—abhors the prospect of abundance, which can only be seen as a threat to its profitable operations. This

*Continued from page 4*

system of production, et al, for the benefit of the owning, profit-consuming capitalist class, must be replaced by the socialism of the bottom—the continued survival of the world commonwealth, the common ownership of the land and water production and the use of the free assets of the abundance of goods and services readily available.

—A.P. Hart  
The meantime will not prove, in the end, to have been worth the sacrifice. We’re stuck in a crazy machine that is going nowhere. We won’t get out by voting either for change or for more of the same. We need a new system—one based on common ownership of the means of wealth production by society as a whole.

Capitalism requires class struggle. This alone works most of the time to the advantage of the system’s beneficiaries—the owners of capital. Both winners and losers, in committing to this struggle, acquire a stake in it. If you have had enough of this stupid waste of your time and intelligence, want out of capitalism’s pointless vale of tears and want in its

\* My emphasis throughout.

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(Literature)**



The “new kibbutz” model would not (as yet) go in for wage differentials: it proposes that almost everyone should get equal wages.

Economically and socially, what sets the kibbutz apart, in the world of business, is its locally fixed character. The “new kibbutz” concept is an obvious first step toward “normalizing” the status of kibbutz profit-making activities from a market standpoint; once effected, this reorientation—by the sheer momentum of its bottom-line logic—would force the rest of the plunge into the marketplace on the “kibbutz sector.”

Prof. Rosner argues that kibbutzim in general show a higher labor productivity than “other sectors of Israeli agriculture and industry” (21.5 percent vs. 9.2 percent for output and 38.9 percent vs. 19 percent for exports).<sup>1</sup> He also implies that kibbutzim, owing to their unique structure (which is not totally commercial and relies on “mutual help”), are better suited to operate under low-profit conditions than are the standard (presumably corporate) enterprises, which rely on economically (and psychologically) alienated individuals selling their working abilities to their employers. The “kibbutz experience,” he says, “also has the ability to create ‘moral obligation.’” The kibbutz is also relatively well poised to absorb the looming expenses of green marketing (due to the increased cost of replacing constant capital) because it operates by its very nature from a basis of ecological sustainability.

### A reaction to crisis

By comparison, the relatively ungenerous arguments of the “New Kibbutz” movement amount to little more than a sort of reductionist reaction that reflects, unthinkingly, the “growing obstacles” created by “[d]emographic, social and economic changes, as an outcome of mass immigration, statist and bureaucratic trends in the labor movement and especially the rightwing governments since 1977...” The “New Kibbutz” concept assumes, ominously, “that the economic crisis can be overcome only by allowing

market forces and profit considerations to have priority over social and value-related considerations, by promoting greater individual autonomy in all aspects of kibbutz life, and especially by increasing consumer sovereignty in the areas of consumption and need-satisfaction.” And what of the humanitarian motives that originally inspired the launching of the kibbutz movement? Staying in business will henceforth require (according to the advocates of the “New Kibbutz” concept) that the “economic activities of the kibbutz should be based on market principles, while the implementation of kibbutz egalitarian and democratic principles should be confined to the community.”

### Robbing Peter to pay himself

In other words, the market begins to take on the character of a universal, and the “larger values” become marginalized and “private.” This was only too predictable, given the fact that, “new” or “old,” the kibbutz has come to depend for its very existence on the division of wealth into commodities: goods and services for sale (at a profit) on the market. Kibbutz members only give back to themselves out of the profits returned from sales the surplus value they took away from themselves as wage-earners at the point of production.

But this is taking everything a little out of context. “Historically,” the author points out, “the founders of the kibbutz saw it as an efficient means of regrouping the Jewish people in their traditional homeland.” “Regrouping a people in a homeland” in a context of capitalism (as the writer plainly assumes) implies an unchanged basis of society, and anything that enhances the efficiency of the process aims (obviously) at somehow or other improving the way capitalism operates. The ultimate premise here is the good old Fabian-Leninist one that “socialism” is really only the improved conduct of capitalist affairs on an “enlightened” model provided by an enlightened (politically organized vanguard) minority.

Not surprisingly, as an economically significant vanguard minority with market interests to protect, kibbutzim group themselves in three federations “distinguished today mainly by political affilia-

tion and historical tradition. The two main federations are affiliated with the Labor Party<sup>2</sup> and the Mapam-Socialist party. All belong to the Israeli Federation of Labor (Histradut).”

But if people’s lives *outside* the kibbutz framework—97 percent of Israel’s population, minus the capitalist minority—were beset by the same insecurity, egotism and exploitation as life generally is everywhere else under capitalism, doesn’t this place the “socialist” aspirations of the typical kibbutz member in a rather questionable light? Nor do things improve on knowing that the “kibbutz sector” was originally envisioned as efficiently strengthening and helping to build the Israeli state—which has until only recently systematically exacerbated capitalism’s daily evils for some people within its borders (the Palestinians). Still less so, considering that the Israeli capitalist class’s successful defense of its interests has jeopardized and tormented the lives of whole populations outside the Israeli state since the latter’s inception. If the ideals of the kibbutz can only be achieved or pursued in such a context, then do they really have anything to do with socialism (a worldwide system), in spite of their arguably universalist and progressive character?

### Common ownership

In the low-grade reality of the world we have made up till now, the kibbutz does have its place as an alternative mode of capital accumulation. Real socialism—common ownership and democratic control of the means of wealth production and distribution—actually cancels out the separation that is employment by removing capital from all points of production and distribution. It eliminates the overall requirement of paying for goods and services (i.e., abolishes wages). Needs determine consumption as well as production, and individuals (or, for that matter, freely associated groups) determine needs.

Clearly, neither the Israeli nor any other economy (organized along whatever other lines) has any room for such a basis of society. The kibbutz is an impressive example of how the will to cooperate furnishes a sound basis for organizing society any way that people want—and organizing it so that it functions normally. The kibbutz does not demonstrate that it does, on the other hand, demonstrate that

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**(“Are you a socialist?”)**

What is happening to the kibbutz, as outlined in the May 1993 issue of *Jewish Currents*, is only too typical of efforts to combat the market economy without eliminating it. “There are today 270 kibbutz communities,” says the author, Prof. Menachem Rosner, “varying in size from 50 members in newer settlements to about a thousand in some of the older ones. The kibbutz population is only three percent of the Israeli population but produces 40 percent of the agricultural and eight percent of the industrial output.” The kibbutz communities are obviously an important sector of Israel’s economy. He adds: “the kibbutzim played a major role in the building of the Israeli nation”—another way of saying they promoted its economic growth (development).

### “Self-managed” capital

Any economic unit that functions in such an environment can be thought of as a “business,” an “enterprise,” a “company” or a “firm.” What ordinarily makes a business a business—taking industry or agriculture as the model—is the fact that the producers are separated from the means of production. The company employs the producers (of wealth); its separate ownership rights over the capital invested in the enterprise (or “means of production”) constitutes the fact of separation. Productively speaking, the whole concept of employment depends on this separation. A kibbutz, which is “self-managed,” overtly lacks this ordinary feature; but that is just another way of saying that, as capital, it employs its own owners—not so rare a condition after all, nor so antithetical to the conventional market model as one might think.

It does not matter how the company organizes itself internally, how the group of people linked together by their common employer manage their affairs. What counts is that this organization exists separately from the process of deciding what constitutes a need and who has needs (separately, in short, from the human community at large)—an arrangement that only makes sense if the organi-

# The kibbutz— precursor, yes; model, no

zation can decide who will have access to the products or services it makes available to society.

Such an organization is a market entity and can only exist in a market context; it will give access to society at large only if the latter (in the form of individual members of the social community) can provide it with something of equivalent value, i.e., can buy its products in the marketplace. Lacking this capability, those who are socially, in effect, not its customers can expect no one to acknowledge their needs or the importance of satisfying them. Market or business entities can grant access only to paying customers (consumers).

Thus, anything organized to function in the marketplace is a business entity and must stay in business. This requirement supersedes all others—particularly any of an ethical, moral or philosophical character. The aspirations of the founders of the kibbutz, says the author, “were to implement humanitarian and socialist ideals of social justice, equality and participatory democracy. The kibbutz was seen as a model and vanguard in the achievement of this goal.” The present-day crisis of the kibbutz forces the question on its leaders of how to stay in business because it is a crisis of the marketplace, a crisis of capital accumulation, and the kibbutzim taken as a whole act as a functioning sector of a capitalist economy—as capitalists—even as they profess humanitarian and “socialist” ideals of social justice, equality and partici-



patory democracy.

### The “New Kibbutz”

The crisis of the Israeli economy has put the squeeze on the kibbutz. A “business wing” has arisen within the kibbutz movement with a challenge to the existing structure: the “New Kibbutz” concept. Its proponents would reduce the kibbutz to its market component, abandoning self-management (featuring rotation in office) and introducing the principle of hierarchy into the organization of labor. They would allow the profit-making businesses operated by the kibbutzim to buy supplies from the general market and hire outside workers.

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