

Marx, the First Real Globalist

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If nothing else, the wholesale plunder of the planet's natural resources has brought into sharp focus the necessity for some kind of global (and globally enforceable) regulation of what's left of the planet's precious cargo of life. But can capitalism undertake such a task? Not only that, is it willing to do so and is even some kind of 'reformed' capitalism capable of doing so given that the basic drive of capitalism is expand or die.

The clarion call of Marx and his 19th century socialists was Internationalism, 'All Workers of the World Unite', predicated as it was on the globalizing nature of industrial capitalism as it sought to expand the capitalist market into every nook and cranny where there was a buck to be made. And in so doing, Marx correctly predicted that industrial capitalism would create an organized and politically conscious working class wherever it spread, who were at the time, the most advanced section of working people, and that it would be the organized working class 'led' by a revolutionary organization that would do away with capitalism and replace it with a rational, planned socialist economy.

So much for the theory. The practice has taught some of us valuable lessons about just how difficult it is to build a socialist economy and not merely because we had nothing but theory to go on but also because the dominant capitalist states were determined that any and all alternatives to capitalism would and should fail and crucially, should be seen to fail.

That said, it is now apparent that the scale of the plundering is so huge that it threatens the future of life on the planet let alone the possibility of socialism, and it is most visible in the planet's oceans with some estimates suggesting that in less than forty years 90% of the ocean's fish stock will have been wiped out. With 1 billion people totally dependent on fish as their source of protein, this is a crisis of staggering proportions. And the thought of our planet's oceans empty of life is simply too appalling to contemplate! The ocean is after all, our womb, we even cry salt tears.

The plain fact is, that rather than rising populations being the cause of resource depletion (Malthus rears his ugly, dead head once again), it is the insatiable appetites of the allegedly developed nations, perhaps 10% of the world's population that is responsible for the carnage.

Around ten million sharks are slaughtered every year just for the unfortunate creature's fins to satisfy the desires of a handful of wealthy Japanese. The carcass is tossed back into the ocean.

Every year millions of tons of tuna are sucked out of the ocean just so we can have a damn tuna sandwich, and it's not like these are necessities, they are luxuries we can well do without. But how do you regulate 70% of planet when our 'global' economy is a free-for-all?

The issue is simple: can capitalism solve the crisis that confronts us without signing its own death warrant and is it even willing to try? History shows us that the answer is a resounding no to both questions.

Is Cuba showing us the way forward?

There is a certain irony in the fact that Cuba, through force of circumstance has had to embark on the construction of a sustainable economy. But it's no accident that the world's only socialist economy has embarked on such a revolutionary course for it is literally the only country on the planet capable of undertaking such a task. That it is in part because of the decades-long US embargo coupled to the collapse of the Soviet Union in no way diminishes the accomplishment. But regardless of the reasons, Cuba has shown us not only that it's possible but impossible without a planned, socialist economy.

Imagine if you will, another island nation, the UK, taking a comparable route to the future? Cuba is after all, a poor country that for decades has been deliberately starved of resources and, like other countries that attempted to construct socialism, it lacks a developed infrastructure. In a word it was the least equipped to take on such a gargantuan task, let alone do it in the shadow of 'El Norte'.

Everything that Marx wrote 150 years ago pointed in the direction that we are now being forced to consider. But will it take ecological collapse to get us to confront the issue and will that be too late?

This is not an academic question, it is now an issue of survival. But will it be only when there are no cans of tuna on the shelves or fish in the chippie that our overfed and under-informed populace wake up to the reality of the situation?

In the past, the struggle for socialism was predicated on economic and political justice for all working people and this hasn't changed but what has changed is that the effects of unending 'growth', that is, expansion of the capitalist 'market' has finally met its limit, the planet itself.

But if you think this would be some kind of wake-up call to our so-called leaders, think again. Can a leopard change its spots? Instead, it's seen as yet another opportunity to make money! Worse still, the responsibility for ending this madness has been dumped on us but crucially without any corresponding power to do anything meaningful about it. Instead we are brow-beaten into tightening our belts, even criminalized for dumping too much garbage! Garbage we didn't create but are forced to buy when we go to the supermarket. We get the guilt and Tesco's shareholders get the gelt.

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