

Socialism or Barbarism: the Choice is Ours

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Theme: [History](#)

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Time is of the essence. Given the descent into barbarism that the world is witnessing as a result of the breakdown in capitalism, there is a very real danger that US-led militarism could escalate even further from its existing criminal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan/Pakistan into an all-out conflagration with any number of countries designated to be geopolitical rivals or miscreants: China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, Cuba. History proves that this is always the brutal outcome when the profit system is threatened with total collapse.

For those committed to creating a world of social justice and peace, it is vital to communicate as widely as possible as to the precise cause of the present economic failure, with its consequent social misery and violence. Let's not be under any illusions about the root of barbarism today: it is, as Rosa Luxemburg and others have pointed out, the failure of capitalism as a system of production and distribution to meet human needs in an equitable, democratic and sustainable way.

Equally vital in this hour is the need to put forward an alternative to barbarism in order to mobilise the majority of ordinary people ravaged by the capitalist kleptocracy; to provide a clear set of social, economic and political objectives. Otherwise, the kleptocrats - the corporate leaders, banks, financial gamblers and their political and military servants - will attempt purging the crisis through escalated war (and all the chaos and disinformation that will ensue).

What also needs to be communicated widely is that the objective of democratic control of the economy cannot be achieved within the two-party system of the US and most other western states. These parties have shown themselves to be willing partners-in-crime with the oligarchy, which also includes the leaders of labour unions who have served to emasculate workers and their rights.

To that end, the case must be made more than ever that socialism is a viable alternative to this barbarism. To save time and space here, readers can avail of several existing statements for practical, socialist change (for example, see www.wsws.org and www.workerscompass.org). In brief, the objective is to bring production under democratic control so that basic human needs for food and accommodation, meaningful work, health and education become the determinants of the economy - not the private profit of an elite that has evidently brought whole societies to their knees. As a first step, the major, vital industries (manufacturers, energy, communications and banks) must be properly nationalised, that is, brought under democratic control to meet needs democratically. A half-baked form of nationalism is already underway with taxpayer bailouts of automakers and banks. The trouble is that the kleptocrats are still receiving the lion's share of financial rewards. So, any baulking by the oligarchy and their media mouthpieces over "public ownership" should be laughed at with derision.

In communicating the viability of socialism, the use of language needs to be precise in order to debunk myths and disinformation so as to help the constituency for change – the majority of citizens – retain their focus on the required direction for democratic change. Here are some myths and disinformation:

Myth 1: Capitalism runs on the supply and demand of free individuals exercising choices in a free market. This is a powerful myth because it deceptively conflates a deeply held democratic principle of freedom with economic workings. Whatever about early capitalism of two centuries ago and more, the present period of late capitalism is largely bereft of free markets and choices. Think of Boeing and Raytheon. These “emblems of American capitalism” would not survive without massive taxpayer subventions from the \$710 billion that the US government lavishes on the Pentagon every year. President Obama recently congratulated top Wall Street bankers on receiving multi-million-dollar bonuses, saying that it was the manifestation of the American “free market” system. Given the monopoly of these banks, the ruin that they have plunged societies into, and the taxpayer bailouts to shore up the unseemly wealth of a financial elite, the espousal of such a myth by Obama is ludicrous. Also, just what is so free about the millions of workers who were compelled to take on reckless mortgage debts in order to make ends meet because their wages and livelihoods had been bled dry over decades by the oligarchy?

Myth 2: Centrally planned economies don't work. Try telling that to the world's top transnational corporations, all of whom plan their production and distribution operations rationally with massive government (taxpayer) intervention to facilitate their operations. Oil companies are a classic example. The biggest oil company in the world, Saudi Aramco, is estimated to be worth \$7 trillion and dwarfs the likes of Exxon and Royal Dutch Shell. Aramco is rated as one of the most efficient international enterprises in terms of production, technological innovation and business. It is 100 per cent state-owned and bankrolls Saudi Arabia's social development. In the real world, that kind of industrial success is more akin to socialism than notional free market capitalism. There is no reason why similar control could not be applied to all major industries, especially given recent developments in information technology (another centrally planned success!) which would ensure production and supply is geared to meet real social needs.

Myth 3: Socialism has been tried and doesn't work, degenerating into despotic barbarism. References to the Soviet Union are a red herring. The Stalinist-type dictatorship came into being under specific historical circumstances, for example, the immediate attack on the Russian Revolution by the West, creating an inward-looking bureaucratic state run by a reactionary elite. Note also the deformities of the Second World War and the ensuing Cold War (see Jacques Pauwels, www.globalresearch.ca). Many supporters of socialism were among the most trenchant critics of the Soviet Union long before its collapse. And anyway, what if a crude attempt at creating socialism failed? Capitalist economies fail all the time throughout history, degenerating into despotic barbarism, as in the present.

Myth 4: Socialism is un-American. While the Stalinist caricature of socialism is contrary to the values of US citizens – and other democratic people – the principles of solidarity, equality, and opposition to elite power are not. The many accounts of socialist movements throughout American history, as documented by the late Howard Zinn, are testimony to that.

Myth 5: Socialism already exists in the form of the US oligarchy. This is a particularly wrong-

headed myth. Some commentators have referred to the White House-Wall Street complex as Obama's "Marxist/socialist entourage". Paul Krugman, writing in the New York Times, describes the cozy relationship between government and financiers as "a kind of socialism". Make no mistake: the deformed, dysfunctional economies of the US and Europe are the outcome of decades of capitalist misrule. To label the crisis wrongly with lazy terminology, as Krugman and others do, only serves to disinform the wider public as to the true cause of the problem and what can be a viable change of course.

Myth 6: The crisis is caused by "unfettered capitalism". In other words, capitalism can be controlled. It can't. The entire history of the US - the unravelling of legislation and the bending of courts and the constitution by corporate lobbyists - is a classic case study in itself of how capitalism inexorably subverts democratic control and concentrates power and wealth for a minority, leaving the majority dispossessed and disenfranchised.

Myth 7: Class politics and class war is an anachronism. Ironically, just the opposite. The living standards of workers, their families and communities are being brutally savaged by a tiny class - the oligarchy. The constituency for radical political change in the US, Europe and elsewhere has probably never been bigger. And of those workers - whether blue or white collar - lucky enough to still have a job, just ask how many of them feel as if they are one pay cheque away from poverty. That amounts to a serious class of people with abundantly more common interest than the wealthy elite; a serious class of people who increasingly have "got nothing to lose except their chains".

All the above is only a sketch of what kind of society and economy is achievable. More details can be added as people come together to work out, through the consensus of the "common good", what they need to achieve. The point for now is to encourage the majority of people to work together; to think and act independently from the misrulers, with all their myths and self-serving disinformation; to be confident in the conviction that real democracy is achievable; that basic human needs can be met equitably; and that countries can co-exist in a true spirit of peaceful internationalism free from the barbarism of capitalist rivalry and war. Socialism is the way for this to be achieved, not just because it is morally right, but also because it is arguably a superior form of society and economy.

The emperor has no clothes...

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Finian Cunningham has written extensively on

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