

THE DANGER OF FASCISM AND THE PROMISE OF SOCIALISM: REFLECTIONS ON THE GLOBAL CAPITALIST CRISIS

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Abstract: The fundamental contradictions of capitalism—social commodity production for profit maximization paired with private appropriation of profit and the means of production—put capitalism in a state of perpetual crisis that intensifies over time in both severity and scope. Thus it is axiomatic that the present historical juncture finds capitalism in yet another moment of its perpetual crisis. In need of clarification are the unique features of the current stage of the crisis as well as the question of whether humanity will continue to live under a degenerating capitalism or make a progressive break with the old society and begin construction of a new socialist system that avoids the mistakes of the past while remaining free of capitalism's fundamental contradictions. Degenerating capitalism and the social unrest that accompanies it raises the threat that the capitalist ruling class will resort to fascism in order to save their system, but it also creates opportunities for the working class to stage a resurgence of socialism in order to save humanity from a catastrophic decline of human civilization. This article will present a series of reflections on the current state of the crisis with the goal of determining how it affects prospects for the advancement of socialism on the one hand and the danger of fascism on the other. It will deal with the question of whether bourgeois democracy or people's democracy provides a way out of the morass of economic decline, environmental catastrophe, perpetual war, and looming fascism.

Key words: capitalism; socialism; imperialism; fascism; revolution; revolutionary situation; bourgeois democracy; people's democracy; Marx; Lenin; Stalin; Dimitrov

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Introduction

Marxist political economy understands with greater clarity than any other approach to the study of world society that the fundamental contradictions of capitalism put capitalist societies in a state of perpetual crisis that intensifies over time in its severity and scope. The current economic depression should not be seen as an anomaly, but rather as part of the normal operation of capitalism and as a variation on the overarching theme of capitalism's degeneration and eventual collapse. Since capitalism is now, and has long been, a global as opposed to a purely national or regional phenomenon, it is no exaggeration to say that the entire planet is now a victim of capitalism's varying but ever-present calamities. There is much truth to the saying that when the advanced capitalist countries sneeze, the whole world catches cold. What happens to the rest of the world when capitalism contracts a terminal illness? A general but not entirely unhelpful answer is that it will drag the whole world down with it, and that it does this by spreading poverty, environmental catastrophe, and imperialist wars around the globe.

In their broad outlines, the ultimate sources of capitalist crises, as expounded in the Marxist classics, remain unchanged because they are part of the internal logic of all capitalist systems, including capitalism's present phase of imperialist globalization. These sources consist of the contradictions that result when commodity production for profit maximization is conjoined with private ownership of the means of production, wage labor, and private appropriation of profit.

Let us remind ourselves that at a certain point in the development of capitalist civilization, the capitalist mode of production fails to produce economic and social progress. As Marx put it:

At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work before. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. (1983: 160)

Today we see the practical working out of this principle in the economic and social immiseration as well as the environmental catastrophes that result when the increasingly backward, corrupt, fascistic and warlike capitalist world system prevents the peoples of the world from developing productive forces, social relations, and public policies that advance human well-being and the viability of the planet's ecosystems, instead of sacrificing humanity and the natural environment on the altar of the profit motive.

This article offers a series of reflections on the current state of the crisis of capitalist civilization. Its object is to clarify how the problems of capitalism at this historical juncture affect prospects for the growth of fascism on the one hand and the advancement of socialism on the other.

The Threat of Fascism

The significance of the present epoch lies in the simultaneous, synergistic, and historically unprecedented intensification of several aspects of capitalism's predicament: the economic crisis which has resulted in massive unemployment, huge cutbacks in social spending, and the bankruptcy of entire nations; the weakening of imperialism coupled with new imperialist wars; stepped-up attacks on trade unions, collective bargaining rights, and working class living standards; increasing racism, anti-immigrant legislation, religious bigotry, and xenophobia; the environmental crisis and the global warming emergency; and the general failure of bourgeois democratic political systems to respond to capitalism's crisis with progressive solutions. It is clear that capitalism is a social system that is reaching the limits, in terms of exploitation and conflict, of what humanity and nature can withstand (Webb 2011: 3). The internal logic of capitalism compels it to keep pushing beyond those limits, but to continue to do so would be absolutely disastrous for people and the planet.

In many imperialist countries, particularly in the United States, which has been moving further and further to the right for the past 40 years, there is a whiff of fascism in the air, a sense that the ultra-right is waiting in the wings, ready to spring into action when the bourgeoisie decides that their rule can be preserved only through open violence and terror.

As Marxists, we are well aware that capitalism attempts to solve its problems by shifting all sacrifice onto the backs of the working class and by meeting all attempts at resistance with ferocious repression. It must be remembered that today, in the era of imperialist globalization, fascism will attempt to enslave not just the working class of individual countries or regions, but of the whole world. This is nothing really new, however, because fascists have always been intoxicated by the dream of world conquest and a global empire of brutal exploitation. As Georgi Dimitrov put it over 70 years ago:

The imperialist circles are trying to shift the whole burden of the crisis onto the shoulders of the working people. That is why they need fascism.

They are trying to solve the problem of markets by enslaving the weak nations, by intensifying colonial oppression and repartitioning the world anew by means of war. That is why they need fascism. (1986: 2)

This acute description of fascism's methods and *raison d'être* is also a prediction of what awaits a world held hostage by declining capitalism. It has never been said better or more clearly, and it has never been truer than now. Fascism is imperialism's method of last resort. If the imperialists decide that they cannot preserve their hegemony in any other way, fascism will be the order of the day.

New Wars and New Disasters

Moribund imperialism increasingly resorts to open aggression in order to safeguard what it can no longer protect through peaceful means. The most recent example of this is the efforts of the United States, France, and the United Kingdom to lead a coalition of imperialist countries and their client states in launching missile attacks and bombing runs against Libya. What was sold to the United Nations, to the peoples of Europe and America, to the countries of the Arab League, indeed to the whole world, as a plan to establish a no-fly zone in order to protect innocent civilians from attacks by Libyan government forces, was quickly and intentionally transformed into an offensive war, a partisan military expedition in which the United States and its allies sided with anti-government forces in the Libyan civil war. Colonel Muammar Qaddafi's violence against his own people was used as a pretext for military intervention in Libya; for more violence against the Libyan people in the name of preventing violence against those same people; for violence against that country's independence perpetrated in blatant disregard for the principle of the self-determination of nations. Presented as an act of violence to end violence, imperialist declarations regarding the humanitarian motives of the intervention are highly dubious. It has been reported that NATO has refused to acknowledge or investigate civilian deaths resulting from its air strikes against Libya (Chivers and Schmitt 2011), and the International Criminal Court has just announced that the death of Colonel Qaddafi may have involved war crimes, although the existence of such crimes and the nature of any NATO involvement in them remains to be proven (Lederer 2011). Furthermore, the whole world knows that government repression against the people's rebellions in the US client states of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen has not resulted in "humanitarian" intervention in the internal affairs of those countries; but of course the governments of those countries are already solidly within the imperialist camp.

It is plain to see that the aim of the war is to advance the economic and political objectives of the key imperialist actors. The economic aim is to pacify Libya and to ensure that its new government is brought firmly and irrevocably into the imperialist fold, to break its ties with socialist Venezuela, and to keep it out of the orbits of China and Russia. True to the nature of imperialism, this is fundamentally a war to secure markets for the export of capital and to control access to natural resources.

But it is also about domestic politics in the imperialist countries; Obama needs a quick and easy military victory, a war of his own to burnish his image for the 2012 election before a public that worships warrior presidents. Sarkozy needs the same, and the UK is always looking for opportunities to punch above its weight in world affairs. If Libya were neither an attractive field for investment nor a major supplier of oil and natural gas nor an opportunity for a convenient little war, the intervention would never have proceeded. Unlike the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, which have broken out in countries that are already integrated into the Western imperialist world order, it is clear that the imperialist powers intend to exercise direct control over the outcome of the rebellion in Libya in an attempt to ensure compliant Libyan governments in perpetuity. Thus in addition to all of the problems sketched above, we must add that the West, led by the United States, has chosen to place yet another burden on the already heavy-laden imperialist beast by waging war on an additional Muslim country.

Simultaneously with the Libyan War, the catastrophe in Japan has demonstrated how a great nation can be reduced to horrifying and bewildering helplessness when it is betrayed by its leaders and subordinated to the requirements of capitalist development. In speaking of Japan's plight, I am not putting a spotlight on that country's vulnerability to natural disasters, but rather its defenselessness against the man-made disaster of a nuclear debacle. This is not the fault of the Japanese people, but rather of Japan's ruling class, which has inflicted on the people, despite their protests and legitimate concerns, a highly dangerous and unsustainable network of nuclear power plants that help to fuel Japan's long-stagnant state capitalism and rampant consumerism. Despite that country's wealth and surface technological sophistication, Japan's inept, secretive, short-sighted, and deceitful ruling class has proven incapable of dealing responsibly with one of the fundamental problems facing human societies: the provision of safe and clean energy. Is a social system that is unable to safely provide for such a fundamental human need as energy worthy of survival? Perhaps Japan will serve as just one among many a harbinger of the coming senescence of the capitalist approach to development, while the awakening of the peoples of North Africa and the Middle East, Asia and Latin America portends the rise of the exploited billions and of a hopeful, progressive approach to developing human societies.

Fascism and the Current Crisis

That capitalism is in crisis is a truism; indeed, capitalism is always in crisis, but it is a truism of the first importance that in the wider world is more often forgotten, or glossed over, than straightforwardly acknowledged. Thus, it is axiomatic that the present historical juncture finds global capitalism in a new phase of its historical

predicament, with more chaos and violence and an apparent drift towards fascism looming on the horizon. The threat of fascism is another frequently whitewashed, but ever-present danger of capitalist society. In the long run, capitalism and bourgeois democracy are always moving toward fascism, not in a linear, step-by-step fashion, but in the manner of an ebb and flow that follows the up and down but ultimately declining fortunes of the capitalist drive for maximum profits.

The intensity and widening scope of the present crisis presents humanity with stark alternatives: degeneration or renewal, a further drifting towards fascistic barbarism or progress towards socialism. Due to the present cascade of problems, humanity now faces, in addition to the old existential threats of economic ruin and nuclear warfare, a newly assertive imperialism, and environmental catastrophe accompanied by demographic upheavals and profound cultural retrogression. As the economic and environmental crises deepen, the acquiescence of the world's peoples to the imperialist world order is likely to wane. In response, the capitalists will increasingly use naked force to preserve their rule and we will move ever closer to the day when the bourgeois world order is transformed into textbook fascism, i.e., "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital" (Dimitrov 1986: 2).

We must avail ourselves of all organized methods of combating incipient fascism, which include international working class solidarity, uncompromising resistance to imperialist war, national chauvinism, and all forms of racism and bigotry, and efforts to increase economic and military cooperation among anti-imperialist countries. We also need a strategy for defending existing socialism and advancing and improving socialism. Our efforts must be made in the context of building a worldwide, united front against the global dictatorship of capital, a front dedicated to resisting fascism and building socialism of the 21st century.

Also in need of clarification are the features that are unique to the current stage of the impasse. We need a realistic understanding of the question of whether humanity will continue to live under a degenerating capitalism or attempt a liberating break with the status quo and begin a progressive movement towards a new socialist-oriented world order, one that avoids the mistakes of past attempts at socialist construction while freeing humanity from the descent into barbarism that will result from capitalism's inability to overcome its fundamental contradictions.

Our era of deteriorating capitalism and declining imperialism is a long-term trend that contains within it all concrete manifestations of capitalism's quandary: the particular effects in each country of the worldwide economic collapse; the imperialist wars in Iraq, Afghanistan-Pakistan, and Libya; the scourge of future wars; working-class pushback in the developed capitalist countries; the Arab awakening; successful resistance to imperialism and neo-liberalism in Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and other countries of Latin America; neoliberal and ultra right-wing

attacks, on a global scale, against working-class living standards and the people's attempts to assert their democratic rights; the rise of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) as counterweights to Western imperialism; the rising costs of petroleum-based energy; global warming, surging pollution, radioactive contamination, and mass extinctions; and many other challenges to the legitimacy and stability of the bourgeois status quo.

These trends increase the stress on the imperialist world order and help hasten its demise, but they also raise the probability that capitalist ruling classes throughout the world will attempt to defend their threatened hegemony by increasing open repression.

The history of the 20th century makes it clear that moribund imperialism will fall back on fascism as its last line of defense. It is reasonable to expect that in the 21st century global imperialism will try to bring about much more than a mere ad-hoc collection of locally-grown fascist states, as did the national imperialisms in the period between the two world wars, but rather a planet-wide network comprised of local fascisms affiliated and organized on a global scale to protect the capitalist world system from outbreaks of people's revolutions and to crush or co-opt those revolutions before they multiply and proliferate. Nonetheless, the rise of fascism also creates its dialectical opposite in the form of new opportunities for the global working class and its allies to stage a resurgence of socialist initiatives to save civilization from descent into a new dark age.

Prerequisites of Revolution

No one is claiming that the empire will collapse overnight. It is certain that it will collapse, but the hour and the day cannot be predicted. It could take decades, even centuries. The speed with which the collapse of 2008 swept across the globe tells us that we must be ready to take advantage of sudden upheavals in the short term, while at the same time we must never lose sight of the fact that we are in a protracted struggle and must be prepared to operate accordingly. Marxists must take the long view. They need a clear understanding of whether this current juncture in capitalist civilization's general crisis is leading straight to a revolutionary situation or merely passing through a period of economic disorder, collapsing empires, military conflict, and mass discontent that will gradually abate and leave the foundational structures and supporting institutions of imperialism weakened but intact until the next flare up of crisis conditions.

Such a discussion must begin by considering the general characteristics of revolutionary situations. V. I. Lenin addressed this very question in *“Left-Wing” Communism—An Infantile Disorder*:

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The fundamental law of revolution, which has been confirmed by all revolutions and especially by all three Russian Revolutions in the twentieth century is as follows: for a revolution to take place it is not enough for the exploited and oppressed masses to realise the impossibility of living in the old way, and demand changes; for a revolution to take place it is essential that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. It is only when the "lower classes" *do not want* to live in the old way and the "upper classes" *cannot carry on in the old way* that the revolution can triumph. This truth can be expressed in other words: revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters). It follows that, for a revolution to take place, it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking, and politically active workers) should fully realise that revolution is necessary, and that they should be prepared to die for it; second, that the ruling classes should be going through a governmental crisis, which draws even the most backward masses into politics (symptomatic of any genuine revolution is a rapid, tenfold and even hundredfold increase in the size of the working and oppressed masses—hitherto apathetic—who are capable of waging the political struggle), weakens the government, and makes it possible for revolutionaries to rapidly overthrow it. (1977: 84–85)

Lenin was talking about revolution on a national scale whereas the subject of the current discussion is the potentiality for capitalist collapse on a global scale. This does not mean that Lenin's observations are irrelevant, for they apply on the global as well as the national level. It is difficult to imagine how a new round of revolutions against the capitalist world order could begin on anything other than a national basis before spreading to other nations and eventually engulfing entire regions, continents, and hemispheres. Hence the continuing applicability of Lenin's preconditions of revolution.

We must also consider the question of where the revolution will begin. Will it begin in the advanced countries at the core of the capitalist system, or in the underdeveloped countries at the periphery? J. V. Stalin addressed this question in 1924 in *The Foundations of Leninism*:

Where will the revolution begin? Where, in what country, can the front of capital be pierced first?

Where industry is more developed, where the proletariat constitutes the majority, where there is more culture, where there is more democracy—that was the reply usually given formerly.

No, objects the Leninist theory of revolution, *not necessarily where industry is more developed*, and so forth. The front of capital will be pierced where the chain of imperialism is weakest, for the proletarian revolution is the result of the breaking of the chain of the world imperialist front at its weakest link; and it may turn out that the country which has started the revolution, which has made a breach in the front of capital, is less developed in

a capitalist sense than other, more developed, countries, which have, however, remained within the framework of capitalism. (1953: 100)

Do not the Russian, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and many other revolutions of the 20th century bear this out? Do not the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions of the present day and the uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East conform to this principle as well: that revolutions begin in less developed countries rather than highly developed ones, in the disadvantaged countries of the hinterlands rather than the glittering capitals of world civilization? For what are these revolutions and revolts essentially but rebellions of the abused, disregarded toilers against tyrannical and corrupt governments, repressive police states, and the hopelessness engendered by neoliberal economic policies, policies and governments that were all backed (even in the case of Libya) by the United States and the imperialist world bloc.

Is This a Revolutionary Situation?

In the spirit of Lenin, let us try to determine whether world capitalism faces an actual revolutionary situation by considering the following questions and answers:

1. *Is the world experiencing a global crisis that affects both the exploiters and the exploited?*

The answer is yes. The world is undergoing a crisis composed of at least two interrelated predicaments that affect all humanity, both the exploited and the exploiters. The two predicaments are: (a) the failure of global capitalism as exemplified by the world economic depression, the increasing gap between the affluent and the destitute, and the prevalence of imperialist wars; and (b) the approaching limits to capitalist exploitation, pollution, and destruction of nature in the form of the planetary environmental crisis. The effects of the environmental crisis are well known. And if there is any doubt that capitalism has failed miserably at meeting human needs, let us take a moment to consider the state of humankind in this capitalist world. Out of a world population of 7 billion, there are currently 2.6 billion people who must try to live on less than \$2 per day (United Nations 2010: 96); the average adult has only about six years of formal schooling (Nation Master 2011); at least 621 million are unemployed (Central Intelligence Agency 2011); and about 925 million people suffer from hunger (Hunger Notes 2011). Is this a world that is developing people's abilities and meeting human needs?

2. *Has the established order reached the point at which it is impossible for it to continue functioning in the old way?*

In the Arab world, the answer is clearly yes. Decades of state repression, neoliberal economic policies, and subordination to imperialism have finally driven the Arab peoples to rebel. But all that is certain at this time is that they are carrying out political revolutions, trying to replace the old regimes with new, more democratic regimes, and attempting to dismantle the apparatus of state repression. It is too soon to tell how far the revolutions will go, whether the old ruling classes will be extirpated or whether they will return to power under new guises. The Arab revolutions threaten imperialism, but this does not mean that the rebellious countries will make a decisive break with imperialism or that, upon doing so, they will not be reintegrated into the imperialist world order at some future time. Furthermore, there is no indication that the Arabs are intent on overthrowing their domestic capitalist economic systems; all that seems likely at this point is implementation of various reforms by new bourgeois-democratic regimes that will leave capitalism intact.

The most recent breaks with capitalism and imperialism have occurred in Latin America, most notably in Venezuela, and with the growing Bolivarian Alliance (ALBA) initiated by Venezuela.

In the advanced capitalist countries we find widespread but largely peaceful, reformist movements against attacks on collective bargaining rights, austerity programs, and all other attempts to make the working class pay for the economic depression. There have been huge demonstrations in France, Greece, Portugal, the UK, and many other countries, including the United States. But this movement, while offering stiff resistance to anti-worker policies, falls far short of creating a revolutionary situation. In the advanced countries, people are disillusioned with capitalism, but the majority is still wedded to the idea that capitalism can be reformed, and it is still willing to live within the system. Nevertheless, it is interesting that in my own country, the USA, there are growing numbers of people who are willing to question capitalism. A poll conducted in the United States in 2009 found that 20 percent of Americans thought socialism was better than capitalism, 53 percent believed that capitalism was better, and 27 percent were undecided. A single poll reveals nothing conclusive, and it is not really clear what Americans mean by socialism beyond more government intervention in the economy. Still these figures are more favorable toward socialism than one would expect from the most virulently anti-socialist of all the advanced countries. Polls also show that about 70 percent of Americans support a market economy. This is much higher than the 53 percent who unequivocally support capitalism (Rasmussen Reports 2009). Given that Americans are less fond of capitalism than the market, perhaps they could be educated to accept what has long been understood in China: that the market is not the exclusive domain of capitalism and it can function more effectively and more justly when it is given a socialist-orientation (Yang Jinhai 2007: 62). Even more surprisingly, a poll conducted in March 2011 revealed that 11 percent of Americans

believe communism is “morally superior” to the United States’ current political and economic system, and 13 percent aren’t sure. Furthermore, 10 percent think that communism is better for the middle class, and 10 percent are undecided (Rasmussen Reports 2011). These numbers are small in absolute terms, but they are surprisingly high for a country that is still the center of world imperialism, a country where the words “socialism” and “communism” have been vilified for decades.

Where does the People’s Republic of China stand in all of this? Having made a successful break with capitalism and imperialism over 60 years ago, China today is neither an exporter of ideology nor of revolution. But it is a fascinating and inspiring example of peaceful, non-imperialist, socialist-oriented development and a responsible, progressive, and effective approach to the world economic and environmental crises. More will be said about this approach later.

3. Are the global ruling classes conscious of the impossibility of continuing to do business as usual?

There is reason to believe that they are in denial of the possibility that this point has already arrived or is at least fast approaching. Most members of the bourgeois government and business elites seem to believe that capitalist crises are temporary and even beneficial, and that all problems of capitalism can be solved within capitalism. In regards to the environmental crisis, there is little recognition that it is part of the crisis of capitalism. The conventional wisdom is that solving the world’s environmental problems does not require a break with capitalism; indeed, that it does not even bring capitalism into question. All that is required is creation of a “sustainable” capitalism through greater emphasis on alternative energy and environmental conservation.

Those who advocate sustainable capitalism at least acknowledge that there is an environmental crisis. There are, however, powerful members of the ruling classes who deny the existence of any pressing environmental problems, global warming in particular. Outright denial, or at the least extreme skepticism about global warming has become a common position among members of the Republican Party (Fisher 2010), the US political party that represents the most reactionary sections of big business and which currently controls the US House of Representatives as well as many state legislatures and governorships. The United States also has powerful, privately-owned right-wing news outlets which promote the view that the global warming crisis is a scientific fraud perpetrated by anti-American forces; consequently, there are large sections of the American public that believe there is no scientific evidence of global warming. A recent poll in the United States showed that only 28 percent of Americans considered combating global warming a top priority, but the same poll showed that over 80 percent of Americans viewed improving the economy, creating jobs, and fighting terrorism as top priorities (Pew

Research Center 2010). Evidently, the American people have been kept ignorant of the fact that neither economic growth nor job creation can be maintained in the face of runaway environmental collapse and that resource depletion and the climate crisis will surely give rise to conflicts that exacerbate the problem of terrorism.

Even when it does acknowledge global warming, imperialism has gone so far as to blame the problem on the developing world. Consider the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit. The irrational, anti-scientific basis of capitalist development led some developed countries to ignore the conclusions of the world scientific community and deny their historical responsibility for global warming while trying to shift blame onto the developing countries. There was even an attempt by some misguided imperialist governments to deny the people of developing countries such as China and India their human right to economic development. Such behavior creates conflict and wastes precious time. It is a striking example of how capitalist countries make a mockery of sustainability, the climate crisis, and human rights. In the United States, for example, one commonly hears the opinion that the developing countries are doing the most to cause global warming because their aggregate greenhouse gas emissions are the highest in the world and rising. Of course this fails to acknowledge that their per capita emissions are very low compared with the developed world even though their populations make up the vast majority of humanity. It is also an ahistorical view, which ignores the fact that strong arguments can be made for holding the developed countries responsible for the climate crisis. Greenhouse gasses remain in the atmosphere for decades, and it has been estimated that the developed countries are responsible for at least 70 percent of carbon emissions since 1800 (Shah 2009).

To return to the question at hand: the global capitalist ruling class appears to be in deep denial about the profound threats to continued capitalist hegemony represented by their ineffective responses to the economic and environmental crises.

4. Are the majority of workers sick of living in the old way and do they have a conscious desire to overthrow imperialism and the global capitalism that is at its source? Are they shedding their quiescence and joining the political struggle? Are they willing to risk their lives if necessary?

Clearly, the peoples of the world are sick of poverty, unemployment, state repression, denial of democratic rights, and imperialist wars, but on the whole they have not yet connected these outrages to capitalism. They want to end these scourges, and recent history has shown that many thousands, perhaps millions, are willing to join the political struggle and risk everything, including their lives. But they are not yet ready to give their lives to the struggle against capitalism because they are not fully conscious of its role as the source of their day-to-day misery. How long

they will continue the struggle and whether they will take the struggle directly to capitalism remain open questions.

5. Finally, let us ask: Where might the revolution begin?

This writer does not pretend to possess a crystal ball or any other powers of prognostication. All that can be said with certainty is that regional revolutions against autocracy have already begun in the Arab world, and against capitalism in Latin America. In the advanced countries there is deep resentment and large protest movements against ruling class attempts to make the working class pay for the economic crisis, but there is no reason to believe that capitalism faces any imminent threat in these countries. Indeed, in the United States the crisis has caused the public to move further right rather than left. But then there is China, steadily pursuing peaceful development. China is not actively fomenting a revolution against capitalism, but it is providing the world with an example of what can be achieved without it. As things continue to deteriorate, how can the world fail to learn from China's socialist-oriented development model?

Two Approaches to Greening the Economy

In order to get a clearer picture of the advantages of socialist development, let us briefly consider the socialist and capitalist approaches to the environmental crisis. There is no better way to compare and contrast the socialist-oriented approach to this problem and the bourgeois democratic, ultra-right approach than to consider the efforts by China and the United States to build green economies. To begin with, China's leaders understand the gravity of the environmental problems in their own country and in the rest of the world.

China's robust fiscal stimulus in response to the global economic depression included \$218 billion (the largest green stimulus in the world) for conversion to green energies and technologies, railway infrastructure, and water infrastructure. In the fall of 2010 China approved its 12th Five-Year plan for the period 2011 through 2015. The plan calls for massive public spending—some \$468 billion—to convert key economic sectors to green and sustainable energies and technologies. The targeted sectors include recycling, renewable energy, and green technology (UNEP 2010). Furthermore, China's green economy achievements are already considerable. It is already the world's largest producer of wind turbines and solar energy panels, and it accounts for at least one-third of the planet's solar energy manufacturing capacity. China is widely recognized as the world leader on greening the economy, and its commitment to that course is likely to widen its lead in the future (Matthews 2011).

The United States, by contrast, has yet to develop a long-term national energy policy comparable to China's in its ambition and scope. Instead the US relies on uncoordinated, piecemeal projects and schemes proposed by this-or-that bourgeois politician or entrepreneur. In contrast to China, which relies on massive public spending and long-range planning to build key economic sectors, the US depends on unreliable market forces and tax incentives to develop green industry. The high initial costs of green energy projects tend to discourage levels of private investment (especially in this time of severe economic contraction) sufficient to make the US the world leader in the field. This is not to say that the US is not a significant player in green energy and technology, but the country's political and economic climate promises that it will lag behind China in the foreseeable future.

US energy policy is also subject to shifting political winds and the bizarre, anti-scientific tendency of influential politicians and pundits to ignore, downplay, or deny the urgency of dealing with the environmental crisis. For example, as a candidate President Obama promised to invest a relatively small \$150 billion in clean energy over ten years. The bill that would have made good on these promises died in the Senate, and the dramatic rightward shift in Congress in the 2010 elections killed the prospects for passage of a clean energy bill (Lee 2011). There are also a significant number of US politicians who either deny the existence of global warming or deny that it is a problem. Of course, these politicians usually turn out to be shills for America's powerful oil and coal corporations.

No to Bourgeois Democracy; Yes to People's Democracy and Socialism

Now more than ever, the greatest threat to human progress is business as usual under capitalism. The solution begins with the movement towards sustainable, green and peaceful socialism. It will take a massive mobilization of human beings and social wealth to move humanity in the right direction. Socialism is up to the task because it is committed to implementing a people's democracy that puts the promotion of human progress above the profit motive. Capitalism is reaching the end of its capacity to respond to human problems in a progressive way. It denies fundamental problems such as the climate crisis, claims that poverty and unemployment are merely natural and just outcomes of human economic activity, and resorts to fascist repression and war. Capitalism is committed to imposing the grip of profit maximization and the law of value on human beings and the planet. Socialism rejects profit maximization as the fundamental purpose of human activity and attempts to minimize the capacity of the law of value to impede human progress by using rational, scientific planning and people's democracy to mobilize social wealth and human effort in the cause of reaching humanity's highest goals.

The bourgeois-democratic revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt have led to claims that existing socialist countries should revert to bourgeois-democratic forms of government. This stems from a common error among bourgeois-oriented thinkers: the belief that bourgeois governments are progressive in all historical epochs and all situations. In the Tunisian and Egyptian contexts the move to bourgeois democracy is progressive in comparison to what came before. But history is teaching us that bourgeois democracy leads ultimately to the dead end of economic decline, imperialism, environmental catastrophe, and fascism. It would be absurd, indeed criminal, for a socialist country to regress voluntarily to such barbarism. These reflections can only reinforce an essential lesson of the history of socialism: abandoning socialism and restoring reactionary bourgeois governments is not the way forward to the civilization of the future. Humanity's predicament demands that people of foresight and goodwill continue to develop and perfect socialism. In the 21st century, the essence of the traditional concept of working-class rule must be maintained—the leading role of the working class in advancing the people's agenda for peace, prosperity, and sustainable socialism must be preserved.

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