

Imagining A Post Capitalist Society

Every day the papers remind us that unemployment is a huge problem all over the world.

- Millions are getting laid off in China because of the slow down. Graduate unemployment is rising there.
- Massive unemployment in the poorest countries in sub Saharan Africa, the Caribbeans and South Asia.
- High levels of youth unemployment in Europe because of sluggish growth, outsourcing and increasing mechanization.
- Malaysia too is not spared. The B40 struggle to find and hold jobs because of strong competition from the 5.5 million migrant workers. Thousands of young grads unable to get stable jobs.

In today's world, no job means limited access to essential needs for self and family, leading to poverty, severe insecurity and anxiety for millions of families.

Increasing employment sufficiently to provide jobs for the millions unemployed all over the world is simply not possible within this capitalist system. This is due to the means of production being in the hands of the top 10% and they will only employ these means of production if they can achieve a profit.

The sad reality is that the B90's (B90 = Bottom 90%) share of global income has gotten less and less over the past 40years. Even if the top 10% live very extravagantly there is a limit to what they can consume. Their consumption cannot generate a large enough market to support full employment for all countries.

There is a great need for goods and services the world over. Life expectancy in Zambia is 50 years for men (in contrast for 72 years in Malaysia and 80 years in Japan). Maternal mortality in Zambia is 440 per 100,000 births. It is 35 in Malaysia.

Clearly countries in sub Saharan Africa like Zambia need more food, better health services, increase in electricity supplies, etc. But in a global system based on producing commodities for profit, the productive capacity lying idle currently cannot be put to use to meet the needs of the millions in the failing states of the **"4th" world** - that part of our population which is irrelevant to global capitalism.

(But that is not to say that production of exchange values and distribution through relatively freely operating markets should be jettisoned in tow. This system has benefits of being self-regulating and responsive to consumer needs. It avoids the need for cumbersome bureaucracies which invariably tend towards authoritarianism. We need to imagine ways we can harness the market mechanism in post capitalist economies though we certainly wish to bring the productive potential of our societies into democratic control of society – and out of the hands of the 0.1%).

Wealth Inequality and Aggregate Demand

The owners of productive capacity withhold this capacity from producing goods and services because there isn't enough demand for them to achieve a profit. This is because they collectively have grabbed an increasing share of global wealth leaving an insufficient amount in the pockets of the B90.

The first step out of this current predicament of global unemployment is to correct the wealth imbalance and we know how this can be done:

- Better minimum wages
- Social wages in the form of subsidized essential services
- Higher taxes on the rich
- Closure of tax havens
- Taxes on wealth, the Tobbin tax etc.

All these are doable, but as capitalism is a global system it has to be fought globally. All of the above have to be supra-national efforts – blocs of countries have to implement them in tandem. This is another reason why xenophobic jingoism (as espoused by Trump) and fratricidal religious conflicts are phenomenon's which will obstruct the struggle for a better world.

Our Carbon Footprint

Our current level of production is spewing 53 billion tons of CO2 annually. We need to reduce this to 40b tons per year if we wish to cap temperature increase at 2 degree celcius. So even as we wrestle more control of our productive capacities from the hands of the top 0.1%, we need to ensure that production is ecologically responsible. Sustainability should be the principle not "efficiency" as measured in dollars and cents.

We should turn to wind and solar power for energy production even if it is cheaper to build coal fired plants. We need lots of energy on the 4th world. At present Zambia's capacity is 3 Gw. Malaysia with a population which is 2 times bigger has a capacity of 20Gw. Adequate power would do wonders for irrigation and rehabilitation of agricultural land in sub Saharan Africa. We have the technology for this but productive capacity has to be deployed for this.

We should promote peasant farming on 5 - 10 acres of land as this will preserve diversity and require much less chemicals than mechanized high tech farming. It will also help address the problem of unemployment.

In other words, maximization of profits cannot be the main driver of production.

Decommodification of Basic Needs?

A just and equitable economy has to not only produce enough goods and services for the entire population, but also provide the means for all families to earn enough to obtain these goods and

services. With advances in technology such as robotics and etc, society will need decreasing amounts of human labour to produce all its needs - Keynes foresaw this in the 1930s.

If basic needs remain commodities that people have to buy, then the state is obliged to make sure everyone has a job that pays enough to buy all these basic items. What if basic items are taken out of the capitalist market - every family gets food coupons calculated on per capita basis; health education and transport are subsidized etc, - then society is not obliged to create jobs for everyone. If people want luxuries, they can find work and earn that extra. But ordinary people have the option of picking up ration coupons for the basic commodities.

(Frankly, i too have trouble imagining this, but our school education system is based on this model. We only pay a small fraction of the costs of sending our children to school. Tamil Nadu provides food ration cards to about 80% of its population. Health care in many countries is greatly subsidized by pooled resources of the society. We need to reexamine these, analyse their weaknesses and improve on them.

There is also a moral aspect - at some level i feel that there should not be provision of "free lunches" - that lazy and manipulative people will take advantage of such entitlements. How? Maybe you can help in this!

Samir Amin, and China – A Watershed re-alignment of class forces globally?

Samir Amin's description of the neutralization of the working people of the advanced countries in the period from 1950 till 1990 is a useful concept for us to make sense of global geopolitics in that period. Samir argues that the surplus squeezed out from the Third World was shared in part with the working class of the West through the welfare state. Samir terms it the "**Imperialist Dividend**" and this enabled the ruling classes in Western democracies to buy out the working class and forestall a more fundamental challenge to their control of the economy.

Paradoxically, the defeat by the Western powers of socialism as promoted by the Third International, has opened the door to an internationalization of the struggle against the global capitalist system. The phenomenal growth of China's manufacturing sector (as well as off shoring of production to Eastern Europe, Vietnam and the BRICS) has led to the evisceration of the manufacturing sector in the Western powers and a drop in the employment and income of the working class in these countries. The allocations to the welfare safety net have also been cut.

The ever increasing economic hardships of the ordinary people in Europe and North America has led to widespread disillusionment with the existing order. Syriza, Podemos, Jeremy Corbyn and both Sanders and Trump are political expressions of the angst of the common man in the advanced countries.

The capitulation of Deng's China to the capitalist mode of production has led dialectically to a situation where there now exists the material basis for a wide ranging international move to challenge the supremacy of the 0.1%.

John Lennon and the building of a new mass movement

*Imagine there are no possession
I wonder if you can*

*No need for greed or hunger
A fellowship of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world oh oh o o o.*

*You may say that i am a dreamer
But i am not the only one
I bet some day you will join us
And the whole world will live as one.*

The time has come for us in the Left to take up John Lennon's invitation. But we have to talk the language of 2016 and not that of 1917. True, there is much we can learn from the debates of that time, but speaking in the terminology of 1917 runs the real risk of driving away many who recoil from the autocratic dictatorships that characterised Eastern European and Asian "socialist states".

We must look dispassionately at the experiences of the socialist experiments of the 20th century. We must take note of Chile, Indonesia. We must take a deep if sympathetic look at the valiant attempts of Nkrumah, Nyere and Kenneth Kaunda who failed in their attempts at building African Socialism. Cuba, Bolivia and Venezuela also hold important lessons for us. The reasons why China and Vietnam turned to the global markets have to be analysed dispassionately. If we are serious about moving beyond capitalism, if we are to remain true to the principles of empirical analysis and Marxist theory, we must study and learn from the experiences of our comrades who sacrificed much in their attempts to challenge capitalist exploitation, despite huge handicaps arising from the backwardness and poverty of their countries, an unfair international trade system and the absence of lessons they could learn from. Consequently, mistakes were made. It would be inexcusable for us to repeat them!!

We are moving to a new era. There are prospects for a meaningful democratic change leading to a society where greater human development is possible for the majority. But the global elite is now stronger and more powerful than ever before. Their capacity for viciousness should not be underestimated - the promotion of the factional conflict in Syria is just one example. The stakes are very high! Can the Left step up please?

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