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A MAJOR SLUMP ?

MIDDLE EAST

MARXISM AND
ECOLOGY

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A MAJOR SLUMP

In 1979 when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister the economy was already showing signs of entering a recession and the tight monetary policies that her government pursued temporarily deepened it, but her tough line on labour relations, topped by her defeat of the miners, gave courage to employers, (who, until then, had been prone to regard the trade union movement as undefeatable), to resist 'high' wage settlements.

Reductions in government spending enabled interest rates to be reduced, which also had the effect of cutting commercial costs.

As a consequence, costs per unit of output fell and British firms that survived became more competitive in relation to their counterparts in Europe and the U.S.

Although these measures increased the return on capital, the tight rein on spending on the National Health Service, Education, and public transport represented the other side of the coin.

The relatively low cost of borrowing fuelled the consumer boom that followed, and, within the space of ten years, inflation again raised its head.

THE CLEFT STICK

The capitalist system is in a cleft stick. It cannot continue to exist without a steady increase in consumer credit, for without it there would be insufficient demand for the commodities produced. (there is an inherent tendency in the system for production to outstrip effective demand), so that the volume of credit must continually expand. On the other hand, if the increase in the volume of credit exceeds the increase in production, inflation accelerates and the cost of borrowing for productive purposes increases, so that a larger proportion of the values created in the production sphere go to pay interest charges, leaving a smaller proportion for manufacturing profits, thus precipitating a slump in manufacturing industry..

But, as can be clearly seen, restrictions on consumer credit also bring about a slump. The result is a continual see-sawing between boom and slump.

The first and hardest hit in the 1980s slump were firms in the traditional manufacturing industries in Sheffield, Liverpool, Newcastle, Sunderland, and Birmingham, and it was mainly the manual working class who were affected. The subsequent boom did not bring any revival in those industries or in the towns associated with them. It took place in the so-called 'sunrise' industries (those associated with Information Technology), 'Financial Services', and office accommodation, the bulk of this being in the South - East.

The present recession started in this region where eighty per cent of jobs are in 'Services'

The collapse of commercial property values is creating havoc among companies in that field. Job losses in the City are at unprecedented levels. Barclays Bank has revealed that it aims to cut its workforce by 15-20% in the next five years, (about 17,000 jobs).

According to the Building Societies, repossessions are at the same level as in 1980s but this time it is the professional classes who are most affected, accountants, dentists, managers, and others in that income bracket who are having their houses repossessed because they cannot keep up the mortgages. Bankruptcies, almost entirely small firms, are on the increase.

Inevitably, the slump has spread to manufacturing industry, but for the first time since 1945 commercial overheads are being cut, and those who thought they were forever insulated from the tribulations long suffered from those who labour with their hands, are now undergoing what, in current jargon, is called 'a traumatic experience'.

Forecasts are that there will be considerable falls in employment and output over the next four months in every region irrespective of their different characteristics.

Whether the economy will begin to pick up towards the end of this year, as some economists anticipate, or whether it will develop into a deeper slump, is anyone's guess. Economists' predictions are just about as reliable as the reading of tea leaves, but the general mood seems to be one of despondency.

The Thatcher 'miracle' (remember the hype?), is going to be difficult to repeat.

of her had changed from that of admiring her resolve, to categorizing those same qualities as 'pig headedness', thus making her an electoral liability. For her, the crunch came when it became obvious that she was unable to influence E.E.C policy making.

The change in leadership does not portend a significant change in domestic policy. There are no indications whatever that more money is to be spent on schools, health, or public transport; or that manufacturing industry is to be given preference over 'Financial Services', property speculators, and the like.

The 'about turn' on the Poll Tax issue is purely opportunistic. It is concerned with vote retention and does not in any way signify a departure from the fundamental policies pursued by the previous government.

The old policies are being carried through by a more pleasant type of person. The National Health service is being systematically undermined. Under the pretext of subjecting hospitals to democratic control they have been placed in the hands of Trust boards who will own the property and have powers to sell land that they consider surplus. Before the property slump, health authorities were funding half their building programmes from land sales and there are multi-million pound sites earmarked for sales when the market picks up.

30 of the chairmen of the 52 boards, and 190 of the 260 directors, have no previous experience in the National Health Service, and a majority of them are from business backgrounds. 19 of those already appointed are property developers.

Doctors are being pressurized to run their own budgets so that they will always choose the cheapest treatment including the cheapest hospital to which patients in need of hospital treatment will be referred. Whether that will involve extra cost, travel, and discomfort to the patient is of no importance.

The cost of prescriptions, spectacles, and dental treatment is now so high that the considerable number of people who are in the twilight zone between those who are exempted from payment and those who can well afford to pay, find the National Health Service is of marginal value.

Private transport is still highly subsidised, (particularly if company cars and social costs are taken into consideration), while public transport is denied the capital investment that it sorely needs if it is to be made more safe, efficient, and relatively cheap in order that the number of cars and lorries can be cut down..

Underlying it all, the industrial base continues to be eroded. Firms that survived the previous recession are now falling victim to the current one.

Market forces do indeed provide a powerful incentive for individual firms to reduce their operating costs, but the increase in social costs which ensue, make capitalism as a system, increasingly inefficient in terms of the social uses to which its productive capacity is put.

UNEMPLOYMENT.

The system which prides itself on the work ethic that it induces, creates unemployment on an ever expanding scale.

Although production has increased after every recession to date, the rise in unemployment has been fairly steady over the whole period. It is masked by 'Youth Employment Schemes' and the like, but the trend is unmistakable.

In the heady days immediately after the second world war, a figure of 200,000 was considered to be the maximum acceptable level. Now, a figure of 2,000,000 hardly raises an eyebrow.

The public have become conditioned to accept a high level of unemployment while at the same time accepting its work ethic - no mean feat.

Up to now, the unemployed have been quiescent, partly because unemployment appears to be part of the 'natural order' which must be endured, and partly because the 'dole', and a little bit of fiddling on the side, is sufficient to make life tolerable.

It suits the capitalist class and, unfortunately, a fair proportion of the population who are still doing pretty well out of the system, to either ignore the problem, or see the answer in terms of higher Social Security benefits, thus ignoring the social and psychological effects of prolonged divorce from socially necessary labour.

Participation in social labour, (putting something into society as well as taking something out), is not only an economic necessity, it is also a cultural necessity if the individual and the society are to remain healthy.

What is being created is a permanent 'underclass'. (Marx called them the 'lumpen proletariat'), who have no hope except to exist from day to day.

What has become known as 'the inner city problem', is most acute in the United States where whole areas of cities like New York and Chicago are virtually ungovernable. What is more, this problem has increased during the period when capitalism was expanding, yet it is a more deep seated problem than that presented by the mass unemployment of the 30s.

In Britain the problem is not yet so acute, but the trend is pretty clear. It is not so much the poverty, (for this class lives in conditions of comparative luxury compared with what is considered to be 'normal' in Third World countries), but the contrasts within a small geographical radius. It is exacerbated by the inability of the people concerned to satisfy the expectations which are aroused in them by the advertising media.

Whether or not productive capacity in the capitalist world continues to expand, on the basis of past experience, the number of unemployed within the system will continue to increase and so will the likelihood that it will be reflected in a growth in the size of the lumpen proletariat.

From the point of view of sheer class interest it is immoral for any overtime to be worked while there are people seeking work. Nominal reductions in the length of the working week generally mean more hours paid at the overtime rate.

On the basis of both class, and the general social interest, the organized working class needs to propose, and if possible, sponsor, means and methods of drawing the unemployed into the productive process.

Opposition to work sharing on the basis that it is simply 'sharing poverty' needs to be challenged. So must management opposition on the basis that it is uneconomic.

The old argument that attitudes would be different under socialism disregard the obvious truth that socialism will never be

established until the working class moves along the road of rejecting capitalist morality.

This means that class and social interest must be given precedence over sectional, trade, and craft interests.

Furthermore, the working class will only become the leading force in society when it projects moral principles which the mass of the people can embrace as their own because they can be seen as being in conformity with their own interests.

The working class can only become the leading class in society if its class interests can be seen as coinciding with the interests of the mass of the people in the short as well as the long term.

"According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is **ultimately** the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither I nor Marx have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the **only** determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract, and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure - political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc. - forms of law - and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants: political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma - also exercise their influence upon the course of historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form".

Frederick Engels in a letter to J.Bloch. September 1890.

MIDDLE EAST

The intervention of Britain, America, and France, in the dispute between Iraq and Kuwait transformed what was a regional dispute into an imperialist war aimed at restoring the balance of military and political power in the region that had been upset as the result of the building up of the Iraq military machine, with Western and Soviet aid, during the war between Iraq and Iran.

That war had been welcomed, if not fomented, by the imperialist powers because the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini was spreading the doctrine of Muslim fundamentalism which, by appealing to the poor, was having a de-stabilising effect in the Arab countries and was overtly anti American. The contrast could not be greater between the United Nation's attitude towards Iraq when it attacked Iran, and when it attacked Kuwait. The first was virtually ignored even though the war lasted ten years and cost thousands of lives, but the second met with an immediate and massive response.

During the build up to the Anglo American attack on Iraq, the Syrians completed their military control over Lebanon without even a mention of it in the United Nations.

The most flagrant cases of aggression in the Middle East are those committed by Israel against the Palestinians.

The State of Israel was cut out of Palestine without the agreement of the Arabs. After the 1949 war with its Arab neighbours it controlled an area of 7,993 square miles. After the 1967 war it controlled an area of 34,493, square miles.

Although the United Nations passed resolutions which deplored this creeping annexation, no action has ever been taken to implement them.

No wonder that Saddam Hussein complained about double standards.

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS.

The United Nations, like its predecessor, the League of Nations, is an organization which the imperialist use, (as the

occasion presents itself), as a fig leaf to cover their domination of the Third World.

That is not to say that the organization cannot be of any use either to the people of the Third World who are struggling to determine their own future, or to the people of all countries who desire a world free from war, famine, and pestilence.

UNESCO and UNICEF play a useful role in initiating projects in Third World countries which, through the efforts of selfless and committed people, ameliorate the conditions of some of the people who live there, but generally speaking, they are more palliatives than cures.

The General Assembly is a world-wide forum in which representatives of governments can express their opinions and vote on resolutions, and in that sense, it is a democratic institution. But real democracy is about political power, and it is between states that power relationships make themselves felt.

Since the United Nations was inaugurated in 1946, attacks by one country against another have taken place fairly frequently, but without action being taken to deter the aggressor, except in Korea when the North was adjudged to be the culprit at a time when the Soviet seat on the Security Council was temporarily unoccupied.

The American invasion of Viet Nam, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, both examples of blatant, direct interference in the internal affairs of other countries took place without action by the UN.

On a world scale, the United States has committed aggression against more independent countries over the past forty years than anyone else but not once has it been condemned by the United Nations

It has been able to get away with it because it is the chief paymaster of the U.N, and because it has the economic power to bribe or intimidate other countries, particularly Third World ones, into supporting its line.

In the post 1945 period, imperialists have placed greater reliance on subverting the governments of Third World countries, rather than resorting to direct military intervention. Their military

intervention comes when a 'friendly' country is in conflict with an 'unfriendly' one.

The upshot is that all disputes between Third World countries are further complicated by interference from one or more imperialist states,, all of which have one thing in common - the continued exploitation of the Third World.

Voting in the United Nations, both at Security Council and General assembly level, reflect these contradictions between the imperialist states, between Third World states, and between members of the two groups. What does not exist, as yet, is unity of the Third World against imperialism.

The General Assembly of the U.N can, and on occasions is, used by Third World countries as a forum for the expression of their demands, but they have no means of enforcing any resolutions that the Assembly endorses because economic and military power rests in the hands of the imperialist countries who exercise it independently of the United Nations, and they have no intention of placing those resources under the control of the U.N as a body.

Although the United States was the prime mover behind the resolution to use force against Iraq, it rejected proposals to place the armed forces necessary for the purpose under U.N. control, and indeed, once the use of force was sanctioned, control of military operations passed entirely into American hands.

The argument that this was inevitable because it was mainly U.S troops that were involved, raises the question of why this was so, and the reply comes that it was because it was in accordance with the interests of U.S imperialism. If that had not been so, American forces would not have been made available.

Following this through, it means that any U.N resolution to use force to back its resolutions will, of necessity, have to rely on one, or a combination of military powers who have 'interests' in the region. But, once having been given U.N sanction for military action they will insist on retaining operational control and, on the basis that Might is Right, make sure that their interests are secured. To expect anything different would be completely unrealistic either now or in the foreseeable future.

Gerald Kaufman, the Labour Party's spokesman on foreign affairs, writing in The Guardian. 6/2/91, quotes the Party's policy as adopted by the 1989 annual conference -

"A Labour government will make British forces available to the United Nations and the Commonwealth for peacekeeping and peacemaking duties", and adds:

"Other countries, such as the U.S, the Soviet Union, Canada, India, Australia, and of course the Arab and Islamic countries, should contribute contingents."

It is nice of him to invite the Arabs, but apart from that, who would command such a motley crew? Who in their right mind could imagine Russians placing their troops under the command of a U.S General, or vice versa, or placing themselves at the disposal of a Security Council in which its veto would not apply? It is a fact of life that when the armed forces of several nations are engaged in war they must operate under a central command in which one state has the final word, and that state is bound to be the one which contributes the biggest force and the most resources. In other words, any attempt by the U.N to take on the role of world policeman will simply provide one or more of the big powers with an opportunity to use the organization as a cloak under which they can pursue their own imperialist interests.

In terms of voting power, Third World countries can, in theory, virtually dominate the General Assembly, but in practice they rarely vote as a bloc due to their fear of upsetting an economic relationship with one or other of the industrialized countries.

Even if they do manage to force through a resolution which requires the use of force, who is to implement it?

NEO - COLONIALISM

The end of the second World War saw the rise of national independence movements in the colonial countries and their successes made it impractical, for political and economic reasons, for imperialist countries to keep permanent garrisons in the former colonies.

Neo colonialism relies on economic pressure and political subversion to maintain its hold (The activities of the C.I.A are well known in this respect). It cultivates allies in regions which it

perceives to be within its own sphere of influence, supplies them with 'aid' as long as they serve the interests of the imperialist power but this always carries with it the probability that the recipient will eventually find other alliances more attractive, so that relations between countries are always in a state of flux.

The point we are making is that real politics, the politics of the balance of power, are outside the control, and indeed the remit of the United Nations, and although that organisation can be used by the poorer countries as a means of expressing their grievances, they cannot rely upon it to resolve them.

INTER-IMPERIALIST CONTRADICTIONS.

As a general principle, the greater and sharper the contradictions between the imperialist countries, the greater the opportunities for Third World countries to further their own interests.

Contradictions between the two superpowers provide an example.

When the Soviet Union pursued a policy of contending with the United States for world hegemony, Middle Eastern states such as Syria and Iraq could rely on economic and military assistance from the Soviet Union because the latter needed them to provide a counter-balance to the influence of Western imperialism in the region.

The Gorbachev-Shevardnadze response to the economic difficulties caused by the failure of Brezhnev style socialism in the Soviet Union was to pursue a policy of collaboration with America that entailed the ditching of all the Soviet Union's allies in the region.

It was this shift in policy that put Iraq, Syria, and the Palestinians out on a limb and cleared the way for American, British, and French intervention in the Iraq-Kuwaiti dispute.

Even though the Soviet Union during the Brezhnev years had behaved like an imperialist power, the very fact that the contradictions between itself and America were antagonistic meant that the countries of the region could play one off against the other to their own advantage.

The alliance between the two superpowers restricted their freedom of action.

The Gorbachev-Shevardnadze policy had wider implications; it was one facet of a world wide collaboration between the two superpowers in which the Soviet Union accepted a subordinate role.

At this stage in history the world is dominated by the imperialist countries of North America, Europe, and Japan, therefore the present 'world order' reflects that reality which also encompasses the contradictions between these imperialist countries and blocs.

THE NEW WORLD ORDER

The Bush administration promotes collaboration with the pro-capitalist elements within the Soviet Union in order to pursue its dream of a 'New world order' in which American imperialism rules the roost. It cannot hope to do this without allies, and who better than with a country that has a huge reservoir of manpower, vast untapped natural resources, and 'hopefully' dependent upon the United States for capital and technical know-how.

Such an alliance would tilt the balance of world power decisively in favour of American imperialism. (The fact that a Soviet Union rebuilt along capitalist lines, would eventually become a very powerful imperialist rival, must concern the American ruling class, but such are the limited options open to imperialists that their perspectives are limited to a short time span, leaving a future generation of politicians to sort out the consequences.)

Fortunately for the people of the whole world, there are indications that sections of the Communist Party and the military, are, (for their own reasons), objecting to the direction which Soviet foreign policy is taking, and are now beginning to assert themselves. The first clear indication of this was the resignation of Shevardnadze.

The contradictions between America, Britain, and France, on the one hand, and Japan and some European countries, on the other were demonstrated by their refusal to get militarily involved, and their reluctance to give assistance to the 'Coalition'.

Although they were disposed to welcome the defeat of someone who had become 'too big for their boots', they have an

eye on future relations with the Arab world and therefore wish to avoid the opprobrium that will be attached to having taken part in the fighting.

An alliance with a 'reformed' Soviet Union would put American imperialism in a much stronger position with regard to Japan which is successfully carving itself a new sphere of influence in South - East Asia and is, meantime, building up its 'Self Defence' forces.

The European Economic Community is, at bottom, an attempt to unite European capital against both America and Japan.

The difficulties being experienced in trying to complete the current round of talks on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade is an indication of the contradictions between the imperialists and between them and Third World countries.

Meanwhile, in the Gulf! Although Saddam has been militarily defeated, and may even be personally eliminated, the political forces he unleashed in the attempt to gain support are unlikely to be easily dissipated.

His attempt to link a resolution of the Iraqi-Kuwaiti dispute with a resolution of the one between the Israelis and Palestinians, raised his prestige among the Arab masses, and exposed the double standards, not only of Bush and Major, but also of the Soviet leadership who failed to take a stand on principle.

It compelled the Americans to make a statement that the Palestine question would be dealt with 'after the defeat of Saddam Hussein'.

The Arab members of 'the Coalition' accepted this sop, and for the purposes of domestic consumption, interpreted the American statement of 'a Conference at an appropriate time', as implying that the Americans would employ pressure to make Israel comply with United Nations resolutions. Already, American commentators are saying that Arab expectations are too high, a clear indication of the line that the American government will take when such a conference is convened.

One thing seems to be fairly obvious, the rejectionist stance taken by some sections of the P.L.O is becoming more unrealistic by the day.

The Israeli state is now well established and its continued existence will have to be recognized as a fact of life, but that does not mean that the territories that it has annexed outside its original borders are sacrosanct, or that the Israeli State should continue for ever in its present form which is undeniably racist. (For an individual to become an Israeli citizen it is necessary to prove that at least one of the grandparents was Jewish).

Zionists play the 'victims of the holocaust' card for all that it is worth because they know that there is a residual sympathy for victims of the Nazi extermination camps, but it is well past the time when they should be allowed to hide behind this cloak in order that they can continue a genocidal campaign against the Palestinians.

The Israeli state would not have come into existence in the first place without support from the government of the United States, and it is still largely dependent upon financial support from America.

Although domestic American politics play a part, the main reason why Zionists were given American backing was the obvious one that a client state in the Middle East would establish a 'presence' which was then lacking.

In the course of time an Israeli ruling class, with its own interests and aspirations, emerged so that the relationship between the two states have become symbiotic in terms of regional interests.

The Shamir government is obviously intent on continuing the policy of creeping annexation followed by every previous Israeli government, but it can only do so if America continues to provide the funds, so that it is, theoretically, in the power of the United States to compel Israel to comply with U.N. resolutions.

It will not do so, for two reasons. One is that it would offend the very powerful 'Jewish Lobby' in the United States. The other is that it would risk alienating an important ally in the region, an ally whose ruling class has strong cultural as well as economic and political ties with the West.

As far as the Arabs are concerned, it is becoming clear that the Americans are looking to the oil rich Sheikdoms to provide the money, and the Egyptians and the Syrians to provide the

armed forces, for the creation of a conservatively - dominated Middle East.

In order to do that, the Palestinians must be neutralized, (a different thing from satisfying their aspirations), and the Israelis must be guaranteed secure borders.

The odds are that America's Arab allies will, after suitable posturing, sell out the Palestinians by agreeing to recognize Israel in return for paltry concessions.

But the events subsequent to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait have, as most observers agree, stirred the Arab masses into actions that have forced their rulers to take notice. It is possible that the agitation will subside now that the war is over, but things have changed since 1956 when Nasser challenged imperialism. We are now entering an era when inter imperialist contradictions are sharpening and when more Third World countries will resist imperialist exploitation. In short, the world is becoming a more turbulent place, and in such circumstances the thought processes of the mass of the people are stirred into action.

As the Palestinians will be unable to muster sufficient military strength to counter this, the only practical option for them is to use the United Nations Organization as a means of gaining support for an embargo to be placed on Israel similar to that placed on Iraq, for the purpose of making it comply with the relevant resolutions.

The struggle to get such a resolution adopted would give Third World countries something to unite around, and almost certainly undermine American influence among the mass of the people within them.

It would also provide the anti imperialist forces in Britain, America, and elsewhere with a platform on which to unite in struggle with the people of the Third World.

The American juggernaut seems to be carrying everything before it at the moment, but, as Mao said, "it is a paper tiger".

MARXISM AND ECOLOGY

The upsurge, one might say, outbreak, of concern about things ecological in recent years is all the more remarkable since it began in an unorganised way through the activities of people who were often scathingly referred to as the 'beards and sandal' brigade and developed in the face of massive initial disinterest by politicians of every hue. Now, those same politicians are seeking to exploit that concern to their own political advantage.

Traditionally, Marxists have paid as little attention to ecological factors as the most rabid proponents of the capitalist system and the abysmal pollution record of Communist governments has served to strengthen the view that any expression of interest in ecological issues by Marxists, as with other political trends, is purely opportunistic.

The first question for Marxists is, how does concern about the ecology of the planet fit in with Marxist ideology, with the materialist conception of history and the class struggle.

The class struggle occupies a central place in Marxist theory because it is perceived to be the motive power of history, but what is often forgotten is that at the centre of human development is the contradiction between man and nature. Different social formations are simply different means of carrying forward that struggle, therefore class struggle is subordinate to it.

Marxists have traditionally depicted this contradiction between Man and Nature as simply a struggle to expand the productive forces of society. As an historical statement it still holds true, but in terms of the contemporary world, it is inadequate because it is now becoming apparent that there are limits to economic growth, and that the technological means of attaining it are causing so much pollution that the contradiction between Man and Nature is becoming increasingly antagonistic. (According to Marxist theory, contradiction exists within everything. Not all contradictions are antagonistic, but they can become so in certain circumstances).

Both Marx and Engels, for all their genius, were products of their time. ("Man's consciousness is determined by his being"), and were influenced by the then prevalent idea that man could

"master" nature. In modern terminology it is expressed as the belief that there is a technological "fix" for every problem.

Experience is proving that this is not the case. Depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, the inability to make radioactive waste safe, are but three examples.

Engels did utter a warning in this respect in his Work "Dialectics of Nature", when he wrote:-

"Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human conquest over nature. For each such conquest takes its revenge on us. Each of them, it is true, has, in the first place the consequences on which we counted, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel out the first. Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror ruling over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature-but that we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws."

There is little mention in any of the writings of Marx or Engels that the earth's natural resources are finite thus placing an absolute limit on the size of population that the planet can sustain at a given level of consumption per head. But the reason for this was their perception that it was not likely to become a problem in the foreseeable future. This is shown in a letter that Engels wrote to a F.A. Lange in March 1865.

"You yourself ask how increase of population and increase of subsistence are to be brought into harmony," and replies "the exploitation of the inexhaustible regions fertilized by nature herself in South Eastern Europe and Western America will be carried out on an enormous scale hitherto unknown. If all these regions have been ploughed up and after that a shortage sets in, then will be the time to sound the alarm".

Both Marx and Engels seemed to assume that the capitalist system, (and here they were only concerned with Europe and North America), would be replaced by a socialist one before ecological constraints ruled out further increases in production.

Acceptance that the earth's resources are finite and that there is an absolute limit to the level of consumption per head that the planet can sustain means that crude notions of communist society in which there would be a surfeit of material wealth have to be dispelled. In any case, the idea did not come from Marx, nor did he embrace it, but the notion has so taken root in the socialist movement that some erstwhile 'Marxists' have become so besotted with the consumer society that they have forgotten that communism is a cultural concept, not simply a matter of increasing personal consumption.

"Further, it (the appropriation by society of the means of production) sets free for society as a whole a mass of means of production and products by putting an end to the senseless luxury and extravagance of the present ruling class and its political representatives, the possibility of securing for every member of society, through social production, an existence which is not only sufficient from a material standpoint and becoming richer from day to day, but also guarantees to them the completely unrestricted development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties."

Frederik Engels. "Anti Duhring", p311, English edition. L&W

Marx and Engels concentrated their attention on events in Europe and North America because that was where capitalism, the focus of their study, was developing. But today, Marxists cannot be content with such a restricted sphere of interest. Capitalism is now a world wide system, and its unbridled consumption of energy and raw material, and the pollution deriving from the kind of technology employed, is bringing it into conflict with the interests of people world wide.

Although the already industrialized countries are by far the chief offenders they are lecturing the less economically developed ones on the need to be concerned about the ecology of the planet, and trying to impose standards of emission of, for instance chlorofluorocarbons, which would effectively restrict the number of refrigerators that could be produced by Third World countries.

The latter are replying that what it sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. One fifth of the world's population is consuming without regard for the morrow but the other four fifths

are expected to be content with living from hand to mouth, so why should they accept that situation?-and that is the rub.

The size of the problem can be grasped if we imagine that the people living in the industrialized part of the world, through some improbable act of self denial, reduced their level of consumption per head so that the carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse" gasses emitted by them was reduced by half. Let us also imagine that the other four fifths of the world's population then increased their level of consumption per head by the same amount. It can be seen that providing the same technology were used, the world total of carbon dioxide emissions would, at a very conservative estimate, more than treble.

A great deal more use could be made of Solar. Wind, Wave, and Hydro-electric methods, but each has its drawbacks, and even so, they would not be able to provide for the colossal increase in energy usage per head necessary industrialize and consume at the level presently obtaining in the already industrialized countries.

When Rutherford split the atom in the 1930's the prospect of unlimited supplies of cheap energy were held out. In the event, that energy is not cheap, but its main drawback is the environmental damage it causes which present a threat not only to the present, but to future generations. The problems concerned with de-commissioning them, apart from currently disposing of the waste products, makes that form of energy generation ecologically unacceptable. The ancients left us burial mounds and pyramids, our generation is going to leave mounds which cover the radio-active remains of nuclear power stations and vast quantities of radio-active waste.

In any case, as far as most 'Third World' countries are concerned, nuclear power can also be ruled out on grounds of capital costs of installation.

Geothermal energy also has the drawback of cost.

Once it is recognized that the earth's resources are finite and that there is not a technological 'fix' for every problem, then the implications for continued population growth and consumption per head become obvious.

Since Marx's attack on Malthus this subject has been taboo for Marxists as well as the followers of Adam Smith, because both

schools correctly noted that Malthus did not take into account the possibility of future technological developments in food production.

Now the subject of pressure of population growth on possible food supply is being raised afresh, largely as the result of knowledge that global warming is actually occurring. For example, a substantial body of scientists are of the opinion that rising sea levels will threaten huge areas of land that are at present food producing. Bangladesh is one example, a country in which a rising population level is already creating problems.

On the other hand, some scientists believe that an increase in carbon dioxide will increase plant yields

It is reliably estimated that ten million people already die of hunger and related causes every year, and that unless drastic action is taken now, that figure will multiply over the next decade.

No one knows precisely what the overall effect of global warming will be, but only fools will ignore it.

Interwoven with that is the fact that further industrialization and increased use of mechanical transport will certainly increase the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

The already industrialized countries are setting great store by pledges to restrict the output of certain gases to current levels, but inescapable fact is that the former will have to actually reduce their emissions by a substantial amount if the people of the Third world are to achieve a tolerable level of consumption.

A prerequisite for increasing the consumption of the mass of the people in the so-called Third world is that they shall have equal access to fuel, raw materials, and the kind of technology that is appropriate to their particular circumstances. (Appropriate is the key word, but unfortunately it is not in the standard Marxist vocabulary).

It is standard Marxist practice to regard technology as neutral with the political argument centring around the social uses to which it is put, hence the propensity of Marxists to assume that the kind of technology first developed in Europe as the result of capitalist imperatives, (large scale, increasingly capital intensive industry), is the only technological option.

What seems to be forgotten is that each social system has its own specific kind of technological base which has its roots in the previous system.

All development takes place as the result of a process of one dividing into two. This must also occur in the field of technology, therefore Marxists should be promoting those aspects of modern technology that will serve the needs of the post-capitalist society which cannot but be based on a rejection of the concept of continuous economic growth.

During the past twenty years or so, during which consumption per head has increased dramatically in the industrially developed countries, it has, according to the World Bank, actually fallen for a large proportion of the world's population.

There is a direct link between the two which can be shown in the net transfer of wealth from the poorer to the richer nations in the form of interest payments on loans and adverse changes in the balance of trade.

There is a burgeoning struggle by the developing countries to break out of the straight jacket which the present system of world trade imposes upon them. And, whether or not it fits into the classic definition of class struggle, it is in fact a struggle of the poor against the rich.

It is class struggle on an international scale which cannot but eventually centre around a more equitable sharing of limited natural resources and a policy of economic development of a sustainable kind because the absolute limit is set by nature, not man's ingenuity.

Given these parameters, the achievement of sustainable economic growth by Third World countries must be matched by nil growth in the countries where industrialization has already taken place.

The concept, of nil economic growth is alien to many Marxists as well as capitalists, but whereas the former can adjust their ideas to bring them into closer conformity with objective reality, the capitalist is inhibited from doing so because nil growth is contrary to the economic imperatives of the capitalist system. Although this can be explained theoretically, proof of it can be seen in the increase in unemployment that occurs when economic

growth slows down in capitalist societies. It follows that any movement which aims to construct human societies founded on ecological realities must have an anti capitalist orientation.

We are here concerned with concrete policies, not mere declarations. It is obvious that concrete policies will have to vary according to the level of economic development of each country in response to problems (contradictions) as they arise.

For instance, it is common knowledge that the internal combustion engine is the chief source of carbon dioxide, yet no government is prepared to take the drastic steps to reduce car usage. The reason is not simply that it would be disadvantageous electorally, it is also because of the awareness of the probable effects on the world capitalist economy of a drastic cut back in automobile production.

In a more general sense it needs to be recognized that capitalism must continually reduce the costs of production in order to offset the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, thus creating a strong incentive to disregard the social consequences of particular production processes. The massive economic expansion in Europe, North America, and Japan over the past twenty or thirty years was made possible, at least in part, by minimising costs in this way. Now that the growing awareness of the ecological consequences of pollution is forcing governments to take action against polluters, this method of containing costs is becoming less of an option, thus producing a tendency, everything else being equal, for costs to rise. This is being partially offset by the introduction of less polluting technologies, recycling, etc, but almost always these involve larger expenditure of energy, and energy, (other than human energy), is the Achilles heel of industrialization. The conclusion we draw from this is that industrialization, the supersession of human by mechanical energy, is now reaching a stage where it is no longer a feasible option. We are, therefore, entering an epoch when new, less energy intensive technology will have to be invented and used, and frivolous consumption curtailed, if Homo sapiens is to survive.