Black Liberation Series — No. 2

CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM
INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet is part of a series, the Black Liberation Series, published by the Black Liberation Front. They have developed out a number of BLF discussion documents. These discussion documents were first intended to serve as starting points in the discussions which began to take place within the Black Liberation Front from around 1978. They came about because many members of the organisation, which was formed in 1971, became convinced that the old narrow nationalist political line, which the organisation had followed up till then, had done great harm, to it and left it completely unprepared to play active and leading role in the rising struggles of the Black community.

As a result the papers dealt with many questions which were seen as important to the development of a better understanding of the struggle of Black people for freedom. These ranged from general questions, such as understanding how societies work, to more specific ones such as the structure of the Black community in Britain. These discussions were a clear example of the development of the organisation's political understanding since it had published the document "Revolutionary Black Nationalism". This development continues today. During the discussions many changes were made in the original papers, some were rewritten altogether and some were scrapped completely. Nevertheless, this process was an important first step in helping the organisation to break away from its narrow nationalist past and to build a more revolutionary understanding of the nature of Black people's struggle.

The Black Liberation Front has decided to publish these documents for a number of reasons. In the first place they are intended to provide people interested in joining the organisation with an understanding of the organisation's general political position. Secondly, it is hoped that they will make a contribution to the ongoing discussion within the Black Liberation Movement.
As the capitalists are the owners of the means through which the needs of society are met, they are the dominant class in society holding power in the political and legal system and spreading ideas which support their continued rule to all areas of the society.

(i) **political system**

Today throughout the world, there are two main forms of capitalist political rule. These are capitalist democracy as in countries like U.S.A., Britain, France and others, and capitalist dictatorship as in countries such as South Africa, Chile, Turkey and elsewhere.

In those countries, where the political situation is stable and the capitalists feel secure, the usual type of rule is capitalist democracy. In this situation, there are usually a number of major political parties, all of which support and defend the capitalist system, and of which the peoples are allowed to vote for every four or five years. Despite the change of government faces which takes place under this type of "democracy", the capitalists through their control of the economy, army and police, mass media and the civil service make sure that their system remains secure and intact.

In some capitalist democracies, there are also certain rights which the workers have won after years of struggle, such as the right to form unions and strike, to form their own political organisations to demonstrate and to publish their own newspapers. Where such rights exist, the capitalist secret police nevertheless keep a very close watch on those people who are militant and politically active, so that during periods of social unrest they can be quickly identified and arrested. In particular during periods of economic recession, the capitalists continually try to restrict those limited rights which the people have. For example, they introduce laws against strikes and so on.

However, whenever the capitalists are unable to stay in power by means of capitalist democracy, they rule instead through capitalist dictatorships. This can come about either through military coups, led by high ranking members of the armed forces, or by the manoeuvring into power of various fascist organisations and political parties. In these circumstances the capitalists tolerate no opposition to their rule, and the working people have no rights whatsoever. Instead, anyone who speaks out against these conditions can be imprisoned, tortured and even murdered.

(ii) **legal system**

Obviously from capitalist country to capitalist country the exact laws vary. However there are a number of important things which they have in common. In particular they defend the property of the capitalists and make it illegal to take it away from them. Also, present day capitalism no longer accepts that any person can another. The capitalists also pass laws to try and undermine the ability of the working people to fight against their rule, such as the outlawing of strikes and the banning of
revolutionary political organisations. Yet there is no law which ensure the right of every person to have a job.

(iii) ideology
One of the main ideas of capitalist ideology is anti-communism. It tries to paint a picture of socialist society as a place where the people live in fear, always terrorised by gangs of secret police, and denied any personal freedom. A sophisticated version of this idea is to try to lump together the socialist countries with the capitalist dictatorships like Chile, Turkey and South Africa as "totalitarian states".

Another important idea which the capitalists put about is the idea of individual freedom. According to them the individual is more important than society and therefore the interests of the individual must be taken into consideration before those of society. However in reality this usually ends up as freedom for the individual capitalist to exploit thousands of people, since most workers do not have the financial means to enjoy this "individual freedom".

How Capitalism Works
As has been shown above, the production of commodities which meet the human needs of the society, is carried out in capitalist society by large scale industry, which is owned and controlled by various groups of capitalists. These industries bring together thousands of workers whose work makes them very dependent on each other. For example, workers putting wheels on cars, on a car assembly line, depend on other workers who assemble the wheels and car bodies. In fact the production of one motor car involves hundreds of workers, each doing a small part of the job.

This is quite different from earlier types of societies, where one tradesman might take weeks making a donkey cart, but he would carry out the whole process himself from start to finish. The development of large scale industry under capitalism also leads to greater connections and dependence between the different areas of the economy. For example, the shoe making industry depends on the coal and oil industry to provide power to run its machines, and the car industry depends on the steel industry and rubber industry among others.

However, despite the fact that production under capitalism brings together more and more people and affects all the areas of the society, the ownership and control over these industries remain in the hands of a small group of extremely rich and powerful capitalists.

These capitalists produce these commodities, from shoes to ships, not so that the human needs can be fulfilled. For them the most important thing is to sell these commodities and make the largest possible profit. Profit, not human welfare is the most important thing to the capitalists. Therefore what happens, is that every capitalist is always trying to expand his production, in order to boost his profits. At the same time he is trying to improve his production technology so that, say, his shoes will be cheaper than those of his competitors and he will be able to corner the market. This is why under capitalism, there is such a rapid development of science and technology. Although this development is good, since it allows human beings to work more efficiently it must be remembered that the capitalists only use it in their wild chase for maximum profits.

However, as a result of this chase there usually results in what is often called a "crisis of overproduction". This is when the various capitalists, each in an effort to corner the market, produce more commodities than the ordinary people can buy. As a result they remain unsold and pile up in warehouses, and the capitalists do not get the return on their investment. So to try and safeguard their profit, the capitalists begin to cut back sharply in production, closing down factories, selling off the machinery and throwing thousands of workers out of work. During such times, many smaller capitalists are driven to the wall and go bankrupt, and the various capitalist groups quarrel more and more openly as to whose goods should be allowed to circulate in which markets and at what price. Such quarrels can and do sometimes lead to wars. It is also during such periods that social unrest increases, and the outbreak of revolution becomes more possible.

The Spread of Capitalism
Having first established itself in western Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by the early twentieth century capitalism had spread to every corner of the world. This spread is usually called imperialism and was often carried out by the most brutal violence, in some cases involving the mass murder of thousands of people.

As stated earlier, the capitalists are always trying to increase production, so as to increase their profits. So when they had cornered the markets of Europe their greedy eyes landed on the various other countries of the world. They saw these lands as sources of raw materials for their new industries, great pools of cheap labour where the workers could be kept almost in slavery and sometimes in actual slavery, and vast markets for their finished goods.

The first form imperialism took was that of old style colonialism. The various capitalist states in Europe sent their troops off around the world to invade other people's countries, seize the land, run up their flag and declare these captured countries "colonies" of this administration, whose main job was to force the people of these countries to work in the mines and fields, railways and ports producing and transporting raw materials for the capitalist industries, and providing a market for the finished goods with their minimum wages they received. At the same time the local social systems came under increasing attack, until they were eventually undermined. In this way the capitalist system was established in the four corners of the earth.

However, colonialism also brought other changes. In all the colonies a class of workers, from the mines, plantations, railways, docks etc. came
into being. Along with them, there also arose a new class of clerks, teachers, etc. who worked mainly in the colonial administration. Shortly various people from these two class began to agitate among the local population, the overwhelming majority of whom were small farmers, for an end to colonial bondage. They spoke out against the occupation of their countries, the unbearable exploitation, the land the theft carried out by the colonisers, the discrimination and many other injustices. This soon developed into a massive popular movement throughout the colonies, which was so powerful that it forced the capitalists to abandon the old style colonial system, and grant at least formal independence to the ex-colonies.

Despite this retreat by the capitalists, however, they could not and did not give up their control over the colonies. Instead they continued it in a more sophisticated and underhand way. This system is today called neo-colonialism. In place of the old colonial administrators sent out from Europe, there were now to be found local people in positions as top civil servants, judges, army officers and chiefs of police. But in the neo-colonies the capitalist system remained intact and those changes which took place made little or no difference to the lives of the ordinary working class people. Even now, the big multi-national firms like Fords and ICI still use these countries as sources of cheap labour. In many cases, in order to increase their profits, capitalists will move factories from western Europe to a Third World country, where the cost of labour is much less. The working people in the capitalist neo-colonies are the most exploited people in the modern world. Many suffer from malnutrition and hunger, and many others die each year from diseases which can be cured. Unemployment in most of these countries stands at around 30% and large numbers of people are forced to leave their countries in search of work. (Note At the moment unemployment in Britain is about 12%). In many of these countries the working people have no rights, and can be sacked, or sometimes even imprisoned for simply demanding better wages and conditions. This in fact is the real face of capitalism in the world today.

From the birth of the capitalist system, the working people fought against the unbearable living conditions which it brought them. Many people dreamed of a better and happier future without the poverty and oppression of capitalism. However, it was not until during the nineteenth century that the work of, in particular, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels laid down the basis for scientific socialism. They made a careful study of the Capitalist system, exposed the way it worked and predicted that it was bound to be overthrown and replaced by socialism.

It took some time, however, before the first successful socialist revolution took place in 1917, in Russia. Since then the socialist system throughout the world has steadily grown, and despite some setbacks is today a major force in world affairs. Victories in eastern Europe, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Mozambique and Cuba have all helped the growth and consolidation of this system. Socialism differs from capitalism both in its substructure and its superstructure.

a) Substructure
Production in the socialist system is also based on large scale industry and the development of science and technology, but the big difference is that whereas under capitalism production is carried out for profit, under socialism it is geared towards meeting human needs. Therefore under socialism, private ownership of the huge factories, banks, insurance companies and so on is abolished and these things are taken away from the capitalists and become the property of the people. By doing this the political and economic power of the capitalists is destroyed. The state then manages these factories etc. on behalf of the working people.

Another important feature of the socialist economic system is the central planning of the economy. Since the working people through the state now have full control of production in the society, it is possible to make the most efficient use of resources and to develop all the areas of the economy, and not only those which are profitable as happens under capitalism. For example in the capitalist system, there is not much investment and time spent in building houses for people to live in, since this is not seen as a profitable area of the economy, whereas in socialist countries housing is seen as an important social need and a great deal of time and effort is spent in providing housing for people to live in. Through the central planning of the economy, the socialist countries are able to avoid the capitalist economic crises, which are caused by overproduction and lead to massive unemployment. They are able to achieve this because production is planned according to how much people need, and not according to how much profit can be made. In this way there can be a continuous rising in the living standards of the working people.

Since under socialism the profits which are produced are not pocketed
by a handful of millionaire capitalists, they are available to be used for the benefit of the working people. Most of this profit is usually reinvested in different areas of the economy, such as agriculture and industry in order to develop these. Some of it is also used to pay for social services, such as health and education, which are provided for the working class. In fact in some socialist countries, for example Albania, all the government spending is covered by these profits, and the working people do not pay any taxes.

b) Superstructure

The superstructure in socialist society is again quite different from that of capitalism.

(i) Political system

The political system of socialism has two important features. The first one can be called the dictatorship of the working people. What this means is that the capitalists, who have had their property taken away and who hate the socialist system, along with their supporters are denied various rights. They are prevented from organizing politically and from spreading their ideas throughout the society. Any attempts by them to undermine and disrupt the socialist system are dealt with severely.

The other major feature of the socialist political system is socialist democracy. Unlike capitalist democracy it is genuine democracy for the working people. They have a large number of rights, such as the right to work, to vote, to assemble, to criticize and to take an active part in the political and social life of the country. These rights do not just exist on paper, and in the socialist countries there is no widespread unemployment like under capitalism. There are also local People's Councils and a national People's Assembly to which representatives are selected. However, unlike the capitalist MP's they do not disappear from sight after the election until the next election, but instead they have to give regular reports back to the people, and can be dismissed by them if they do not carry out their work properly. These representatives are not professional politicians as under capitalism, but ordinary workers who return to their jobs after they have finished their period as a representative. There is also widespread discussion by the working people of important new laws, the Five Year economic plan, new constitutions and so on.

In the socialist countries the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, housing and transport, are provided and kept at a very low price, so that all the working people can afford them. At the work place the workers Trade Unions are responsible for such things as safety and can override the management on these questions. These are some of the rights which the working people enjoy under socialist democracy.

(ii) Legal system

The socialist legal system, unlike that under capitalism, operates in favour of the working people. In the first place racist and fascist organizations are completely outlawed, and have no rights to organise and propagate their ideas.

It also outlaws the exploitation of people's labour, and various types of social oppression. Further to this it ensures people's right to a job an achievement unparalleled by any capitalist country.

The socialist legal system defends the rights of the working people to take an active part in the running of the country, and step by step to build socialism.

(iii) Ideology

One of the main ideas of socialist ideology is that the working people and the other oppressed people should be free from the chains of capitalism. It is also opposed to the individualistic ideology of capitalism and argues instead that the individual is part of society and therefore his welfare cannot be safeguarded without safeguarding the welfare of the whole society. It is completely opposed to some people exploiting others and living off them, it therefore sees work not only as a right but also as a duty, and expects all members of society to make their contribution to society. It is against all forms of national, racial, sexual and religious oppression and also world wars, and tries to develop friendship between all different peoples. It also believes in the development of scientific knowledge to serve human need and not for financial profit.

Problems of Building Socialism

However, as can be expected the building of socialism in any country is not an easy achievement and many problems arise and setbacks occur. In particular, due to the fact that the socialist system is still a very young system, not even 70 years old yet, many communists and revolutionaries make mistakes in their work, as a result of a lack of experience. It must also be remembered that these countries are under continuous and massive pressure from the capitalist states, who are aiming to destroy the socialist system. This pressure comes in many forms. First there are the economic blockades, such as the U.S. carries out against Cuba, or there is the placing of economic sanctions and the sabotaging of trade with the socialist countries. In this way the capitalists try to undermine the socialist economies and bankrupt them. Sometimes they try to bribe them to abandon their principles. Also the western imperialists interfere in the political life of these countries, by trying to organise the overthrown capitalists to fight against socialism, and then trying to get support for them internationally by calling them "dissidents" and other such names. Also the imperialists carry out tremendous anti-communist propaganda, even going so far as to set up special radio stations to broadcast to the people in the socialist countries. A favourite practice they use is to threaten these countries with military invasion, and sometimes even to carry out these invasions, or organise terrorist groups to infiltrate these countries, to murder people and blow up economic targets so as to create
conditions of insecurity. These are only some of the obstacles which are placed in the way of those trying to build socialism.

Sometimes, in the face of such pressure, some communists and revolutionaries go weak and begin to compromise on their principles and give up the struggle against the capitalists. These reformists, or revisionists usually end up supporting the capitalist system and speaking out against other communists and revolutionaries. Sometimes some communists do not stick to the principles of scientific socialism in the planning of the economy, and this can have disastrous consequences for the life of the country as happened in Poland. For example, Poland owed the western capitalist bankers U.S. $27.7 billion dollars, as a direct result of the policy of borrowing to develop the economy quickly, which the Polish Workers party followed. This was an important factor in the crisis which overtook that country. These are just some of the problems and setbacks which have arisen during the growth of socialism in the world.

**Triumphs of Socialism**

However the history of socialism in the world is not one of just setbacks, otherwise it would not still be growing. There is a lot which the socialist system has achieved. The rapid economic and social development of the Soviet Union since World War I, along with the crushing defeat over fascism in World War II, in which it played a major part are just two such examples. The liberation of China in 1949, the wiping out of mass starvation and the economic and social development of that country is again a triumph of socialism. The same can be said for Cuba.

Today in the world, those people who are living in freedom, who are overcoming poverty and all types of social oppression, are already beginning to reap the benefits of socialism.
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