

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

THE OCEANS: NEW DUMPING GROUNDS FOR CAPITALISM

It isn't sufficient for capitalism to pollute the land, air, rivers, and forests of this planet. Having achieved that, being the dynamic, resourceful, and enterprising system it is, capitalism is now polluting the oceans by using them as an enormous, free garbage dump. In 1977, Trash Island was discovered in the Pacific, and by 2008 had influenced the circulation of ocean currents and divided into two enormous entities, an eastern one between Hawaii and North America, and a western one between Hawaii and Japan. Together, the two islands make an area more than twice that of the continental USA. The western patch almost reaches Japan, while the eastern section is within five hundred miles of California. Frequently, the western arm encroaches on the beaches of Hawaii leaving a whole slew of plastic behind. Some of this plastic is biodegradable but large amounts are non-degradable and durable. Some fifty-year-old plastic objects have been found on the beaches. Tiny plastic pellets, or nurdles, are the raw material of the plastics industry. Hundreds of millions of them are lost, or split, each year and many find their way, through drainage systems, into the oceans. Plastic is now thought to make up ninety per cent of all the rubbish floating in the seas. A United Nations research program concluded that an average square mile of ocean contains 46 000 pieces of floating plastic. The rotation of the North Pacific water around the islands helps garbage from California and Japan to accumulate. Some is thrown from ships and from oil rigs, but eighty per cent originates on land. It includes footballs, kayaks, lego blocks, and carrier bags. Trash Island has gone undetected

until recently because it is in a relatively unused part of the ocean and most debris floats below the surface. Much of the plastic is transparent and, when immersed in water, becomes virtually invisible, and is not picked up by satellite images. The Caribbean, unlike the North Pacific, is well traveled, especially by cruise ships that, apparently, feel free to dump ground up glass, rags, and cardboard packaging at will. Environmentalists say that debris dumped in the oceans can entangle sea creatures, damage water quality, and alter eco systems. Some trash washes ashore with the winds and currents, fouling the beaches. In the Cayman Islands, the government has traced milk cartons found on shore to a passing cruise line. At the urging of environmentalists, some politicians have passed laws to prevent or reduce dumping at sea, but that brings forward the problem of dealing with the effects of capitalism within the system. Some of the countries with coastlines abide by a UN dumping ban that requires them to treat ship-generated garbage on land. The Caribbean Islands, however, have yet to adopt the ban, saying they do not have the capacity to treat the ship garbage on shore. The UN International Maritime Organization outlawed dumping in 1993 for the Caribbean, a largely enclosed area where a string of islands blocks currents that would flush waste into the Atlantic. It will not take effect until enough of the surrounding countries report their ability for treating trash from cruise ships. This has not been the case, so far. The Caribbean Islands have struggled to establish a common policy, but when it comes to the cruise ship industry, they see themselves as competitors, not partners. Cruise ship arrivals are major eco-

nomie events with passengers annually spending \$US 1.5 billion in Caribbean ports. With tourism as the major industry, it is evident that many businesses could not survive without it, and governments would lose a major part of their tax revenue. For example, the island of Saba, population 1500, is building a new pier to accommodate the larger cruise ships. Some islands fear that a ban on dumping would push ships to dock in their competitors' ports. At present, a battle rages between the environmentalists and capital. The UN and the US coastguard have held seminars on six islands to push for a regional approach in the Caribbean, including the Gulf of Mexico. The officers have stressed how vulnerable their tourism-driven economies are to polluted coastlines. One may well wonder if, eventually, cruise lines would steer clear of the Caribbean permanently. Of course, it is possible but the hotel and resort interests, who depend on tourists for patronage and profit will fight strongly for immediate gain, ignoring long term considerations. Given the anarchic, unpredictable, nature of capitalism, it is a natural response. The companion parties of socialism have explained clearly for over a century that the ownership of the tools of production by a minority and production for profit are the root of this and other problems we face today. They cannot be eradicated within the system if the proposed solution interferes with the profit motive, as shown above. In a socialist society one could enjoy a cruise, and waters and beaches could be clean because there would be no profit consideration to stop it. Why not organize for socialism and give capitalism a 'wide berth'.

Common Ownership means that the resources of the world and the means to produce useful goods from them would be owned by everyone and, therefore, by no one. All humanity would be producers meeting as equals to decide what, how, and where to produce based solely on mankind's needs. Distribution of goods and services would deny no one access to what they needed. This system would end the present class system and render money, trade, employment, exploitation, want, and war obsolete.

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A CLEAN, GREEN EARTH

It would be hard to find a single human being on this earth who wouldn't want a clean, green planet with sustainable human production of necessary goods; with human activity in harmony with nature, taking care not to destroy the habitats of those with whom we share the earth. Obviously, this is not the case in the real world today. Our current mode of production plunders the earth with little regard to consequences, be it clear cutting the forests, open pit mining, discharging toxic effluents into our air, land, and waterways, or causing habitat destruction and species reduction. But if everyone would like a green earth and sustainability, how is it that we have achieved the opposite? Over several decades, many forces have lined up against the willful destruction of the environment. Many



organizations, such as Greenpeace and WWF, have sprung up to fight the worst violations, but, apart from bringing fleeting publicity to a few issues, they have been spectacularly unsuccessful in halting environmental degradation. In fact, year after year, the problem gets worse. Scientists have released dire warnings about the consequences of inactivity, and the world's leading climatologists, through the UN's Intergovernmental Panel, have released regular reports of how we are doing – badly. Governments have convened world assemblies to address the problems and even set targets, at the Kyoto Summit, for example, but to no avail, the targets are invariably missed. The March, 2009, National Geographic issue provides some clues. This edition is dedicated to energy saving. It reports,

“Companies like Wal-Mart that maintain thousands of their own buildings, have discovered that they can achieve significant energy savings. A pilot supercentre in Las Vegas consumes up to 45 % less power than similar stores, in part by using evaporative cooling units, radiant floors, high-efficiency refrigeration, and natural light in shopping areas.” The article goes on to say that retrofits and smart design could reduce carbon emissions by 200 tons per year in the USA but without

new building codes, appliance standards, and financial incentives, it is unlikely to be successful. The same source continues, “Commercial building owners, for example, have had little incentive to pay more for improvements like high-efficiency windows, lights, heating, or cooling systems, since their tenants, not they, pay the energy bills.” Emissions due to transportation are unlikely to improve as automobile fuel efficiency is slow to improve and the total mileage driven keeps rising as developers push neighbourhoods further and further from the city. A third major source of carbon dioxide, the industrial sector, is likewise not improving. The National Geographic article points out, “You would think such enterprises would have eliminated inefficiencies long ago. But that

isn't always the case. For firms competing in the global markets, making the best product at the right price comes first. Reducing greenhouse gases is less urgent.” These three points underline the problem in a profit and money driven economy. Unless there is a definite monetary gain, none of the players, including the population at large, are interested in doing anything about pollution, even if they all agree it would be good to do so. Business enterprises have to compete and therefore shun any meaningful progress beyond the usual inane platitudes, and, in fact, must do all they can to fight the implementation of controls. They create a false “green” and “natural” façade in their advertising while furiously lobbying governments to

gut existing environmental laws and strange new ones and they use their financial and political clout to attack and discredit scientists and their findings. Capital dominates the way our system operates, and its only constant and iron rule is growth. Capital has no morality and those in charge of investments from other people have a fiduciary duty to follow the rule, no matter what it takes. The Socialist Party of Canada, and its companion parties in the World Socialist Movement believe this current system must go if we are to avoid environmental disaster. That doesn't mean going back to some feudal, agrarian society. Our science and technology must move forward and bring new techniques and innovations. But with the Common Ownership of the production and distribution of wealth, with the end

of competition, money and profit, then, and only then, can common sense reign and the whole system be operated in the interests of all. That must be the driving force of our economy, not the enlargement of capital. In socialism, production will be mainly local and regional; self-sustaining communities will share resources and ideas and techniques that work for all stakeholders; intellectual property rights, industrial espionage, and competition that leads to dirty production, cheap and shoddy goods, and, sometimes, to war will disappear. It is our last and only chance to set things right.

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