

Katrina: An act of Kapital?

The recent sickening ravages of property and life wrought by Hurricane Katrina have been extensively covered in the media, except for two rather glaring omissions.

The first was that a society based upon the rights of property over human life had a great deal to do with exacerbating an already traumatic situation. What we witnessed on television the most were stark and pathetic scenes of poor people huddled in a sports stadium, homes lost forever, awaiting supplies and aid that took endless days to arrive, during which time more people died, the ill were uncared for, and conditions of existence plummeted to unsanitary levels often associated with the shanty towns of South America or Turkish prisons, but not with the United States of America.

While these already traumatized souls had to endure an additional trauma of abandonment and lack of the basic wherewithal to survive, millions of homes and offices unused and awaiting buyers sat empty around this country, but were not available to the million homeless of New Orleans whose life savings had been lost in homes rendered rubble, or who simply never had the savings to invest in their own house.

Nobody on television asked the most salient question of all: Should people struck by terrible tragedy be victims of charity at all, or should they instead be automatically entitled to society's wealth simply by demonstrating clear-cut needs for homes, hygiene, food, clothes, and comfort? Since our society as presently constituted is not geared toward the satisfaction of our needs, but rather toward the sale of goods and services to yield profits, it has proved itself demonstrably incapable of meeting needs of the dire and desperate kind, needs that materialized hard on the heels of Katrina. But hey, there are already millions of homeless and poor people in the United States who are not entitled to those vast numbers of empty homes awaiting purchase, so why are these victims of extreme weather any more fortunate?

Had you or I decided to by-pass the sleeping government and simply pick up a couple of homeless individuals and drop them off in another town, we would have had to do so only by taking time off work. Most of us, as workers, have commitments to our employers that may not be so casually by-passed. And in capitalism, even relief efforts are subject

to the welfare agencies' budgetary constraints. Ever heard of the tens of millions of starving and ill children who die each and every year around the world for whom there is simply not enough money to go around?

While relief for those left in New Orleans was certainly offered by the Red Cross and eventually by the state, nobody on television asked the pertinent question of whether it is sane or even effective to meet critical human needs depending upon how much money or how many volunteers may be assembled. What if those of you donating a few dollars at supermarkets for Katrina victims simply don't raise enough? Does that mean that the plight of those struck by disaster is entirely the result of your personal failures, or of a society in which wealth is produced only to be sold, and not to meet our needs? Socialists think the latter.

Nobody on television asked whether by rights the wealth of society should not be automatically due to all individuals. Thus, the million New Orleaners with homes tragically destroyed suddenly enter into that category of "homeless," those without the monetary means to buy or rent housing. Nobody on the idiot box asked the most obvious question of all: Why shouldn't homes be available to anybody who needs them?

A second glaring omission concerns the severity of the storm itself. Many scientists around the world are now convinced that the ecological devastation wrought by modern society has played its part in altering global weather patterns, even while conservative politicians and owners of polluting industry deny such hypotheses and try hard to keep them from being discussed in the media (another good reason for a democratic society with the means of information in the hands of the people).

Tropical forests are vanishing at the rate of city sizes per day, ice is melting at the polar caps, storms are increasing and worsening, temperatures are rising, ozone levels are diminishing. Quite a few scientists have made calculations that if present levels of ecological destruction continue unabated for the next ten, twenty or thirty years, then catastrophic alterations in weather will no longer be avoidable, even if pollution were stopped after such a date.

While it is difficult to be certain if the damage to the planet caused by capitalist production has been responsible for recent changes for the worse in weather, one thing is clear, judging by responses from presidents and politicians and the almost absent coverage of such topics in the major



More on the other side! →

media — such dire warnings from the scientific community are not going to be taken seriously.

This leaves us rightly concerned whether we are heading into an era in which such similarly devastating phenomena as Hurricane Katrina will not be the exceptions, but the rule. The big question is, what are we all going to do about it? Until enough people appreciate the hopeless, even the grim, existence that the future of capitalism represents for the human species and stop leaving critical decision-making to blind leaders of all parties (led by the supremacy of corporate interests), all of us will be increasingly at risk — purely from business as usual. Global awareness begins at home: What are you personally going to do to render this planet a joy to share, to create a society for yourself and your children that meets our needs? Employment isn't just our badge of slavery; it's a millstone hung around the whole world's neck. Human survival demands we now put it behind us, like our childhood toys.

The World Socialist Party of the United States is a companion party of the world socialist movement. It aims to bring about a nonviolent revolution in the ownership of the means of production from private or state to common. In such a society, money will no

longer be necessary, as the things and services we require to live fully (food, clothes, medical services, homes, transportation, and other modern human needs) will be freely available to all. This is because the means of production will be owned in common by the entire community and democratically controlled by it, with today's leaders and élites replaced by truly democratic decision-making on the part of all members of the community.

In a society of interdependent communities based on common ownership, war in a nationless world will be immediately abolished for lack of interest or need, while all degrees of starvation and poverty will quickly follow suit. Without the barrier of economic cost holding back human progress, sustainable ways to provide energy and production for ourselves will be immediately planned and created on a global basis. Our world will become for the first time in its history a truly human family looking after itself.

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THE WORLD SOCIALIST PARTY OF THE UNITED STATES

OBJECT:

The establishment of a system of society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of society as a whole.

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

The Companion Parties of Socialism hold that:

1. Society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labor alone wealth is produced.
2. In society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.
3. This antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. As in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.
5. This emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. As the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and overthrow of plutocratic privilege.
7. As political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interest of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. THE COMPANION PARTIES OF SOCIALISM, THEREFORE, enter the field of political action determined to stand against all other political parties, whether alleged labor or avowedly capitalist, and call upon all members of the working class of these countries to support these principles to the end that a termination may be brought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labor, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

The following companion parties adhere to the same object and declaration of principles: World Socialist Party of Australia, Socialist Party of Canada/parti Socialiste du Canada, Socialist Party of Great Britain, World Socialist Party (New Zealand)