



# Marxist Theory Today: *Three Basic Questions*

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**Our society faces huge, intractable problems. For many people, no obvious or immediate answers are apparent. There are, however, three basic questions that can help to clarify our standpoint and the tasks that arise therefrom:**

1. Can our current capitalist system be reformed to meet the needs of all the peoples in all countries, or does it, will it, only ever serve the rich?
2. Is there a better alternative system?
3. If so, how might that be achieved?

Capitalism is a system based on achieving maximum profit through the investment of capital in equipment, the employment of others, and speculation. A very few people and corporations have nearly all the capital. The richest eight monopoly capitalists/corporations in the world control \$426 billion in wealth – equivalent to the combined wealth of the poorest half of the world's population in 2016. Capitalists exploit employees, by paying as little in wages as they can from the value created by workers' labour and keeping most of the rest as profit. They compete to control resources and markets across the world. Capital must make more and more profit, or it eats itself up. So, capitalists must expand, and they compete ruthlessly with other capitalists. They are compelled to intensify the exploitation of their employees to continually increase profit. Stock markets and shareholders rejoice, and share prices rise, whenever a company announces mass sackings or employment reductions to cut costs. This continual expansion and increasing exploitation are not choices: capital must increase profit or die.

This constant rush creates both increasing exploitation and instability.

"For the sake of larger financial gains, finance capital has been able to inflate asset prices by flooding the world with tremendous liquidity thus inflating debt and

creating increasingly bigger financial bubbles and crises. We witnessed the crisis of Latin American countries in the 1980s and again in the 1990s, the prolonged economic depression in Japan since the bubble burst in the early 1990s, the crisis of South-east and East Asian countries and Russia in the late 1990s, the most recent and lingering global crisis in 2007-2009 and beyond, and the sovereign debt crises in Southern European countries that continue to this day" (Lapavitsas, in *Lenin's Imperialism in the 21st Century* – see endnote).

"Moreover, bubbles created by finance capital have fuelled speculation in residential and commercial construction – the building of resorts, golf courses, upscale hotels and other tourist facilities at a maddening pace all over the world. Such construction has taken over farmland, forests, pastures, and seashores, and thus destroyed the livelihoods of farmers, fisher-folks, herdsmen and others who had lived productive and self-sustaining lives. The expansion of financial bubbles followed by their bursting caused damage no less than all-out wars to these economies. While financial capital is addicted to these ups and downs, ordinary people have suffered severely as a result" (Pao-yu Ching, in *Lenin's Imperialism...*).

## Globalisation and Imperialism

Globalisation essentially means increasing opportunity for unrestricted movement of capital to areas of lowest wages and weakest regulation, labour and environmental protections, in order to maximise profits.

This power of capital has become so great over the past century that capitalism is now a system of imperialism. Previously, the powerful countries were colonial powers, who annexed any part of the world they could in order to exploit it for resources, gain exclusive control of it as a market and/or control it as a strategic point to

protect their empires (e.g. Singapore, the Cape of Good Hope).

For the past century, massive amounts of capital have been generated, and it must desperately seek every opportunity for maximum profit. The export of capital is now the dominant means of commercial activity and profit. (In reality, much of this capital is fictitious -it is mostly just printed dollars or \$US credit.)

The dominant imperialist powers, of which the USA is currently the most powerful, but with China and to a lesser extent Russia, rapidly challenging, are combinations of multinational corporations and their state apparatus. They use, in varying ways and combinations, economic strength and bullying, systematic political interference and control, military co-option and aggression, incessant systematic propaganda and cultural domination, to control countries and regions. Their aim is to invest for maximum profit, secure exclusive control of raw materials and markets, and control strategic points and passages.

They bleed dry countries across the globe. For example, from 1980 to 2009, Africa remitted as profits to the rich countries an average of \$US41 to 47 billion a year! (Dembele, in *Lenin's Imperialism...*)

A recent Swiss study found that:

- The world's 147 biggest multinational corporations (MNC's) (i.e. 0.3% of all multinationals) control 40% of the world's wealth; and 737 (1.7%) control 80% of the world's wealth.
- The combined revenue of the top 10 corporations in the world is greater than the combined revenue of the 180 poorest countries.
- 10% of the world's publicly-listed companies generate 80% of the world's profits. (Quintos, in *Lenin's Imperialism...*)  
"This high degree of capital concentration can also be seen in virtually all strategic industries today.
- Six multinational agrochemical corporations – BASF, Bayer, Dow, DuPont, Monsanto and Syngenta – control 75 percent of the global agrochemical market; 63 percent of the global seed market; and

more than 75 percent of all private sector research in seeds and pesticides in 2013. By controlling the key inputs in agriculture, a handful of MNCs now control the global food system.

- Likewise, the health of the world's population is heavily influenced by the decisions of 10 pharmaceutical companies, which controlled 47 percent of the global market for medicines and medical products in 2016
- There are over 1,300 registered companies in the automotive industry but the biggest 10 MNCs in the sector cornered over 40 percent of all sales of motor vehicles and parts globally in 2016
- Similarly, the top 15 firms cornered nearly half (45.5 percent) of all global revenues in transportation, courier and postal services in the same year. These MNCs now control the means for circulation of commodities in the global capitalist system.
- In the fastest growing sector of the global economy, just six technology firms – Apple, Samsung, Hon Hai Precision, Amazon, HP and Microsoft – control 20 percent of the \$4.3 trillion market for information technology, semiconductors and consumer electronics. Hence a handful of MNCs now exercise virtual control over the means for circulation of information in the global economy." (Quintos)

"Global monopoly capital has transformed once self-sufficient farmers and fisherfolk into export commodity producers. For instance, fish caught in Chile seashore which was the chief source of protein for the people, is now made into fish meal by Purina Cat Food for household pets, and vegetables and fruits produced by Mexican farmers are no longer for domestic consumption but mainly for export to the United States. India, a country with many hungry and malnourished people, is exporting soy beans for animal feed to Europe. Poor people in developing countries compete with cats, dogs, and cattle in rich countries for their basic food needs" (Pao-yu Ching, in *Lenin's Imperialism...*).

### **The capitalist system has developed other key features of recent decades.**

1. Two apparently contradictory things are happening at the same time. Massive profits

have been “earned” and huge amounts of capital are washing around looking for more quick profit. But, at the same time, the rate of profit earned by capital, (after workers have been paid, the profit taken as a percentage of capital invested) on average, has been falling since the 1960's. The capitalist class has imposed so-called neo-liberal policies across the world since the early 1980's. These policies have increased profits by reducing corporate taxes (if and when they are even paid), deregulating financial markets to enable huge, virtually instantaneous capital flows across the world, cutting welfare payments, cutting public services, and privatising government-owned services and enterprises. “They forced governments to go through severe austerity programs to cut their health and education spending, and eliminate food, transportation, and other subsidies to the poor” (Pao-yu Ching).

2. The desperate drive for profit has seen the state, i.e. governments, become increasingly a provider of profit opportunities for big business. In the USA, and now increasingly in Australia, so-called defence industries (they usually have more to do with offence than defence) - the notorious military-industrial complex in the US - milk trillions of dollars of public money i.e. taxpayer funds, to research, develop, sell and maintain military equipment. Australian governments are providing more and more money for such purposes.

Mining industries have long been provided with money, tax breaks and subsidies for transport and export facilities. Privatisation policies have turned public services and functions, such as power and water supply, prisons, health care, education and training, and social services, such as emergency family support and fostering children, into profit-making enterprises. In Australia recently, the provision of government funds for elderly care has brought on an avalanche of private companies advertising their “services” to the elderly.

And when things go bust for the big companies, especially in the finance sector, as occurred in the GFC in 2008, governments jump in and bail them out, using public money to guarantee them

against the consequences of their own greed and recklessness. Profits are kept by the banks and shareholders, but losses are covered by the taxpayer. So, we now have a closer and closer merging of the private financial/military/industrial sectors with the state.

The modern capitalist system is more and more volatile, and stumbles from crisis to crisis. The next crisis, looming large and close, will be fuelled by the massive financial speculation which has continued and increased despite the scare of the GFC, the consequences of the huge printing of money and provision of credit by governments to bail big business out of the GFC, and, in Australia and elsewhere, the housing price bubble and huge levels of personal and household debt, as well as business debt.

### **Capitalism Means War**

Another constant and fundamental characteristic of capitalism is war. Imperialist countries constantly vie for advantage and control.

World War 1 was a carnage caused by the competition between two imperialist camps – the traditionally dominant powers, Britain and France, who had already colonised most of the non-European world, challenged by the newcomer Germany and the ailing empires of Austria and Turkey. The United States only joined the fight in 1917 when, US banks having lent massive amounts to Britain and France, it appeared that Germany would win the war and the US banks would lose their money.

World War 2 occurred as a resurgent Germany sought to seize, in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the mineral and agricultural assets that it lacked. Britain and France were wary of the German challenge but attempted to redirect it east against the Soviet Union to satisfy the capitalist world's anti-communist obsession, and in the hope that Germany and the Soviet Union would destroy each other. In the end, Britain and France had to face the rabid, fascist Nazi regime. In the Pacific, the new wannabe imperialist power, Japan, challenged the control of the US and the old colonial powers, Britain, France and Holland. Again,

the USA waited on the sidelines, bleeding Britain dry with loans and leases, and preparing for the inevitable war with Japan over control of the Pacific.

Ultimately the war became both an imperialist contest between imperialist powers, and a war for national liberation against fascism, racism and vicious repression.

Since then, the imperialist powers have waged wars and instigated military aggression against dozens of countries, of which Vietnam, Iraq, and Libya are well-known examples. Recent attacks on Iraq and Libya, though justified by some valid and many invalid criticisms of the governments of those countries, have really been motivated by the quest to control oil resources and to thwart efforts to write contracts in currencies other than the US dollar. President Carter's National Security Adviser, Brzezinski, said as far back as the 1980's, that whoever controlled the Caspian Basin would control the 21st century. The US is a massive debtor nation but the role of the US dollar as the world's dominant currency enables it to ride out this problem. Any moves to write contracts in other currencies threaten the very fragile America economy.

US economic domination of the world is ailing, but it won't go quietly. So it uses its current (but weakening) military advantage to restrict the economic challenge of China, and to control and crush any independent economic, political or military actions by any other any states.

The US currently has 800-1000 known military bases around the world, 11 aircraft carrier strike groups (i.e. mobile air and naval bases) and has divided the world into 10 Global Military Commands.

US imperialism ropes in subservient countries to act as proxies or to support US military efforts and threats as it desperately props up its ailing, failing empire. Australia, through the subservience of both Liberal and Labor Governments, goes along with US war preparations, buying super-expensive US military equipment so that both armed forces can be best co-ordinated during war,

and obediently deploying troops to whatever war zone America creates.

The US constantly seeks new enemies and threats to justify its world-wide militarism- the danger of communism has been replaced by the threat of international Islamic terrorism, rogue states, and, more recently, Iran, the North Korean nuclear threat, Chinese expansion and military build-up, and Vladimir Putin and Russia.

And both the military brass and the military industries create and exploit opportunities to go to war, so that they can trial their war toys and forces, and of course, use up armaments and equipment which then has to be replaced – an almost inexhaustible market.

### **Destroying the Environment**

Unplanned, profit-hungry capitalism is destroying the world environment. The frightening litany of dire environmental dangers, includes:

- rapidly declining biodiversity
- depletion of non-renewable resources
- global warming
- the acidification and plasticisation of the world's oceans
- depletion of the world's forests and the desertification of vast areas.

"The insatiable need for capital to expand has led to over-production that over-tills the land, over-grazes the pastures, over-fishes the rivers and seas, and pours fatal amounts of chemicals and wastes into ground, air, and water, causing irreparable damage to the earth. Imperialism immensely benefited monopoly capital but is devastating the majority of the world's population, deteriorating its resources and destroying its natural environment" (Pao-yu Ching).

These problems are caused fundamentally by the constant drive for profit and the anarchy of the capitalist system which does, and can do, no planning, because its fundamental dynamic is the rush of capital to any area of profit, regardless of the consequences. Profits are sought through the exploitation of resources, and by the encouragement of rampant consumerism,

whimsical fashions, and throwaway products with built-in obsolescence, to create constantly renewing and expanding markets.

The growing popular political pressure by people around the world on governments and corporations results in half-hearted measures to protect our endangered planet. And worse, corporations then rot any environmental protections to make profit. The Kyoto Protocol created a trade in CO2 emissions, supposedly to encourage CO2 reductions. This trade in pollution rights has expanded into another speculative industry as corporations sell their pollution rights, transfer their polluting industries to third world countries with lower or no pollution restrictions (e.g. the European paper industry, and coal-fired power stations). There are now over 10,000 registered traders in pollution certificates in Europe alone.

Capitalism cannot and will not seriously address or solve the looming environmental disaster.

*So, all in all, capitalism is a bankrupt, exploitative, dangerous system that should be replaced.*

### **A Better Alternative: Socialism.**

Socialism is not a few new policies patched onto the existing system. Fundamental change is required – a completely new and different system.

A real socialist system would involve public ownership and control of the key sectors of the economy – finance, manufacturing, mining, construction, infrastructures, environmental management, big agriculture, communications, vital common resources such as water and power, and public services, such as education, health and housing. The state would own these big resources, and they would be managed by a combination of state and democratic worker control. They would be organised and run for the common good; the benefits shared among the people, not privately seized as under capitalism.

This publicly owned system could and would plan and develop production and distribution

according to the needs of the society and the environment, because the driving force and motivation would be people's welfare not profit.

The political structures and institutions would be thoroughly and genuinely democratic, with guaranteed representation and active participation of all population groups. Representatives would be elected without the manipulation of money or the capitalist media, and people could recall and replace their representatives whenever they saw fit.

Workplaces and communities would also be managed by directly- elected representatives and bodies.

The political system would have to balance the need to enable mass democratic participation against the need to prevent the old, dispossessed capitalist classes from sabotaging and subverting the building of the new society (which they will do – they will fight viciously to resist their overthrow, and then fight even more viciously to regain their privileged positions). This would be a delicate balance that developed over time. One lesson from history is that maximum possible democracy maximises the strength of the people to resist capitalist restoration.

This process will be part of an ongoing class struggle as the vast majority of the people push to move forward to full socialism against the resistance of the old rich, and the weak and doubting. Also, there will naturally be ongoing experimentation, debate and disputation amongst the people as to the best policies and structures to follow. These arguments will also be struggles over ideas – whether new socialist ideas against old capitalist ideas, or just people working out how to move forward, and struggles around vested interests, like possible bureaucracies, better -paid workers, intellectual over manual workers etc. These differences will take some time to overcome, but the struggles will be comradely struggles amongst the people, to be resolved by debate and democratic decision-making.

The socialist institutions will need to be completely new creations, built from the ground up by the people, replacing all the

old capitalist society institutions, which served to prop up the old regime. These institutions would include government and administration, police and armed forces, constitutions and law courts.

The new socialist society would set about creating and supporting new socially-positive cultures to develop and support people's health and welfare.

Socialist society would be internationalist – it would respect the rights and welfare of other peoples and countries, and, as the world steadily turns socialist, usher in a peaceful, environmentally-sustainable world, free of war, bullying and exploitation.

Only these broad outlines of a socialist system are possible and wise, as the exact forms and policies would be democratically determined by each people in and for their own country.

### **Historical experiences**

It is true that past attempts to construct socialist societies have had mixed results – great achievements and tragic failures.

The Russian revolution in 1917 enabled the extraction of the Russian people from the carnage of World War 1, and the reconstruction of their backward, desperately poor and devastated economy into a modern, industrialised, commonly-owned economy. Employment, housing, education and health care were all provided to the whole population.

The revolution had been very bloody; the old Tsarist dictatorship had viciously repressed, killed, exiled and jailed any dissidents for decades. The period of the revolution and the subsequent civil war, in which 16 capitalist nations sent or supported troops to try to overthrow the new socialist Soviet government, was a brutal struggle. It was a class war.

For the first time in history, the revolutionary government set about building a socialist system, without any blueprints or previous experience to draw on, and with constant resistance and sabotage by the capitalist world, and then the threat of attack from Nazi Germany. The building of

socialism, the provision of universal employment and social services, and the substantial beginnings of the liberation of women and ethnic minorities, generated immense enthusiasm among the vast majority of Soviet citizens. But, at the same time, there were arguments and struggles about future directions and several significant opposing groups and even secret conspiracies developed.

It was inevitable that mistakes would be made and a degree of paranoia would develop. Among the leadership, there was often a failure to appreciate the difference between genuine, natural debate and disagreement among people who essentially supported socialism, and those who deliberately created confusion or who sabotaged the socialist project. This confusion led to many Soviet citizens being accused, jailed and some even executed. Some were actively subverting the new society, and some were working as agents of foreign powers like Nazi Germany. However, others were innocent citizens, wrongly accused of opposition, and others were used in the power struggles and conspiracies that became rife in the leadership circles in the 1930s.

We do need to beware of falling into the trap of just accepting and repeating the anti-communist propaganda spewed out by the capitalist world, most of which is not based on fact or honesty. And recent research, and the release of documents from Russian archives, are starting to give us a clearer and more accurate understanding of what really happened in the period from the 1920s to the 1950s, and how, ultimately, capitalism was restored in the Soviet Union, starting with Khrushchev's accession to power in 1954, through to the imperialist, mafiosi-run state of Russia today.

The most important thing is to honestly and accurately identify the lessons that can be learnt from this experience. Our still-developing understanding indicates:

- There is ongoing class struggle as socialism is built, and the Soviet Union was mistaken to declare in 1936 that the class struggle had ended as socialism had been achieved. We need to understand that some

of the disputes and struggles during socialist construction are between supporters and real opponents of socialism who really do want to destroy socialism. But many debates and struggles are between supporters of socialism but who hold different views that need to be heard, respected and often tested in practice to ascertain their veracity. This process is not quick or easy – it can take decades, even centuries.

- The growth and increasing power of a group of leaders who became increasingly bureaucratic restricted mass initiative and democratic activity. This class of bureaucrats developed a vested interest in centralised decision-making. The attempts by Stalin and his supporters in 1936-7 to introduce elections for the Communist Party, the Soviets (i.e. the government organs) and the trade unions were opposed and stymied by the bureaucrat class (led, amongst others, by Khrushchev, then First Secretary in the Ukraine) which felt that their positions of power and privilege were threatened by popular elections. The lesson is the importance of democratic institutions, and the value of developing protocols and structures that keep leaders and administrators in touch with everyday life and under the active control of people's democratic organs.

- Roles and jobs in the Communist Party and the administration were interchangeable. The lesson is that the role of the Communist Party is to lead, to convince the population about why and how to move forward. The administration of the society is a separate function, controlled by popular democratic institutions.

China, similarly, experienced monumental achievements but ultimately a tragic restoration of capitalism and is now developing toward a full imperialist power.

The Chinese revolution enabled China to achieve independence from the depredations of the foreign imperialist powers, to build a socialist system that enabled it to overcome massive poverty, bring a large measure of protection against huge natural disasters, which had frequently killed millions at a time, and provide universal employment, health care and

education. China was constantly surrounded and threatened by the US Navy and military bases. The imperialist powers, and then from the 1960s, the newly capitalist Soviet Union, tried to isolate and strangle socialist China.

There were ongoing ideological and political struggles about how (and even whether) to move forward to build a socialist economy. And a bureaucracy grew as the revolutionary activists took the lead in administering and building the new society. The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution were eruptions of these struggles over power and direction.

Again, we still have a lot to learn about what happened and what went wrong. The masses were often mobilised from above in mass campaigns to build flood-mitigation works, to eradicate diseases, to produce steel and to challenge those bureaucrats resisting a socialist path. Work place and street committees provided some opportunities for the people to exercise direction. But they seem to have been an inadequate substitute for the ongoing, institutionalised exercise of political power by the masses.

The Communist Party and the Red Army had not only led the opposition to, and overthrow of, the old vicious repression of landlords, warlords, and foreign imperialist control - they were the centre and heart of the revolution. Therefore, they attracted all groups and individuals who wanted to join the fight. This inevitably included a wide range of views, courage, commitment and clarity of purpose. The Communist leadership waged repeated campaigns within the Party to fight against opportunist ideas and ethics, both before and after the establishment of the new China.

The Chinese leadership did not build permanent, independent, popular organisations to provide the people with organs with which to exercise democratic supervision of the administration. Therefore, the people had no ready, powerful, experienced means of resisting the growth and expression of anti-socialist policies and personnel to augment the struggles inside the Party.

Again, the lesson is the need for popular, permanent, independent people's organisations to exercise democratic control of the state. The early days of establishment of socialist government necessarily involve strong measures to prevent the old capitalist class from sabotaging the building of socialism and restoring capitalism. At the same time, the Communist leadership must be clear, committed and courageous enough to support the steady establishment of independent, popular organisations, with the legally- and politically-based power to supervise and control government organs.

The Soviet and Chinese reverses have been tragic and dispiriting, but we should remember that the world's transition from capitalism to socialism represents a whole historical epoch in human history- it will no doubt take centuries. We can learn the lessons to build our common world store of knowledge and understanding so that future socialist revolutions (which are already in train in several countries) can be more successful and enduring.

### **The Myth of Human Nature**

It is often claimed that socialism or communism are fine ideas, but really impossible because human nature is essentially selfish.

However, in the original communitarian societies, such as Australian Aboriginal societies, the means of living and surviving were communally-owned and shared. People accepted and respected their roles and responsibilities to the group, to the land, and to other groups, many of whom they never met. People observed their communal obligations and their responsibility to protect country. Their human nature was determined by the needs and norms of their societies.

In some areas of the world, (mainly for reasons of geography and biological availability), living and food acquisition practices gradually developed, knowledge and technology evolved, and productivity increased. As more was produced, social roles became more differentiated; some acquired more of the surplus which they took as their private property, and the (nominally) monogamous patriarchal family

developed so that this private wealth could be kept and passed on down the family line. This first emergence of private property later developed steadily through the historical systems and epochs of slave societies, (founded on the private ownership of people), feudal societies (founded on the private ownership of land), and then capitalism (founded on the private ownership of trading commodities and capital).

These class societies, based on private ownership of property and the means of producing wealth, generated ideologies and values i.e. the human nature of selfishness, individualism and personal advancement. Social conditions produce the values and behaviour of people -these can appear superficially as permanent "human nature".

Socialism is a necessary and desirable system. The construction of socialism presents us with a task and an opportunity: to build a shared, compassionate, democratic society, and in so doing, recreate the sorts of responsible, communally-minded, respectful human nature of early human societies. After all, humans have existed for over 100,000 years. They have not essentially changed in the last 8-10,000 years, since agricultural settlements started in Mesopotamia. It is societies that have changed, so new societies can recreate the characters, the human nature, of relatively recent history.

### **How Socialism Can Be Achieved**

Whilst there is no magic formula or recipe for achieving a socialist system, some general principles and strategies have become apparent.

People all around the world are increasingly taking action to defend their rights and interests.

Over human history, people have typically been deferential, accepting their lot, with only occasional outbursts or revolts. They have been kept down by lack of power; by the dominance of the ruling ideas which prevented them seeing alternatives; by religion, which inculcated a fear of offending the gods or a faith that their lot would be better in the next life. However, the

twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen a qualitative change: people are increasingly resorting quickly to action to defend their rights and welfare.

We see a proliferation of community groups, environmental action groups, new political groupings, as the traditionally predominant state of deference dies away. This mass activeness is not uniform; it fluctuates, but it is a long-term trend.

However, it is always essentially defensive, and limited to trying to ameliorate problems and effects within the current system. On its own, it does not fundamentally solve problems because it does not address or change the causes.

History teaches us that, to achieve fundamental change, people's action requires clear strong leadership. Leadership that:

- has a clear purpose – clear intermediate and long-term goals, and well-thought out strategies
- is closely linked to the people, listening to their views and needs, and linking their struggles to the struggle for fundamental change
- has the highest integrity, honouring people's needs and action, serving the people to build a better society
- is well organised – drawing together all the strands of popular action into a coherent permanent force

Reliance on the parliamentary system to achieve change has always failed, and offers no hope because parliament is:

- not the real power in running the capitalist economy, and
- a talking shop of careerists who compete for the trappings of office and curry favour with the really powerful (i.e. the moneyed and the media)

Strong ongoing organisation is required, because spontaneous uprisings and broad movements, on their own and with the best intentions, have never successfully delivered fundamental change. The recent example of the Arab Spring in 2010 shows how even this mass upsurge across a whole region has achieved virtually no significant change – a

few dictators have been ousted, and replaced by other dictators or ongoing chaos.

The state apparatus has always existed in class societies, and has acted to uphold the interests of those with the power and wealth. This was true under slavery, feudalism, and now capitalism.

The capitalist state performs a range of functions to maintain society – a degree of health and education for the population, regulation of people's behaviour, a precarious balancing of the rights that people have won over centuries. However, most of the law and law enforcement protects and regulates private property.

History, and a look around the world today, shows that the coercive state apparatus - police, armed forces, judicial system, is used to repress any challenge to the property relations of society, and to protect the wealthy. Democracy is more a fiction than a reality – popular democracy has very little real power over economies and the distribution of real power.

As former Prime Minister Gorton said: "Dissent will be tolerated only as long as it is ineffective"

So, as people's action and resistance become more effective, they inevitably run up against repression.

This repression can come from the official state apparatus, or, in order to conceal its origins, from quasi-government groups, like the unofficial death squads or private militias and goon squads we have seen in Latin America and the Philippines. Or privately engaged security firms as we have seen in Australia. Or mercenaries as seen in Papua New Guinea, Iraq and Africa.

The degree and forms of repression vary in different countries and situations, and serious, overt repression appears a long way off in Australia at the moment. But even here, the police and army have been placed on alert when situations may have become critical e.g. during the quasi -coup and overthrow of the Whitlam Government in 1973.

Whatever the form or status of the repression, people need to, and often do, defend themselves. This self-defence needs to become more and more organised and conscious over time. And ultimately, when strong enough and well-enough understood and supported by the people, it can move from the purely defensive to the offensive, and start the revolutionary process of seizing power from the capitalist ruling class and state, and starting to build the socialist society.

In Australia, the first stage will be the overthrow of imperialist control of our economy, our state apparatus, and our culture, and the establishment of an independent country with a large measure of social ownership and control of key resources and industries. This expropriation of the assets of US and other imperialisms will provide a powerful socialist basis from

which to further advance. Once we control our own country, we can begin the step-by-step process of further developing along the socialist road and building full socialism.

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Detailed footnotes have been avoided in the interests of brevity and the planet.

Much of the economic information and quotations are from "*Lenin's Imperialism in the 21st Century*" (Institute of Political Economy, Manila - on-line at <http://iboninternational.org/IPE/Lenin%27s-Imperialism-21st-Century> ).

Much of the environmental information is from "*Catastrophe Alert!*" by Stefan Engel, Verlag Neuer Weg, Essen, Germany (reviewed here: <http://cpaml.org/environment.php?id=495> ).

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