

Chapter 8

THE CRITICAL FACTORS

We have seen, throughout Part One, that the world is desperately sick in virtually every important respect. Unless fundamental changes are made very soon, life on earth will inevitably be extinguished by the end of the 21st century, or even considerably sooner. Speaking prior to the June 1992 Rio de Janeiro Environment Conference, Secretary-General Maurice Strong said : ‘People have only survived on earth for a very minute portion of its history. The phenomenon of life is a rare one and the conditions which support it are very, very exceptional. We are acting in a way which changes those parameters.’¹ At the conference itself he added : ‘To continue along this path could lead to the end of our civilisation. We have to face up to the dire implications of the warnings scientists are sounding. They point to the prospect that this planet may soon become uninhabitable for people.’²

The most evident, and the most poignant indicator of mankind’s sickness, is the dramatic and growing disparity between the haves and the have-nots world-wide; in particular, the denial of practically every vestige of civilised life to three-quarters of humanity in the Third World. The long-running, specious argument, that wealth created at the top will ‘trickle down’, has been nailed once and for all by the 1992 UNDP report, showing that the income of the richest one-fifth of humanity is 150 times greater than that of the poorest fifth. Inevitably, in these still worsening circumstances, man’s instinct for survival will result in violent upheavals by desperate millions having nothing to lose, which will lead only to yet further mayhem and environmental destruction. The same UNDP report forecasts that, failing a fundamental change of hearts and minds, ferocious and prolonged class war will follow, and that the poorest will not be contained behind national frontiers.

Capitalism

The capitalist money system is the root cause of the world’s terrible plight. This pernicious system, nurtured in its earlier years by the slave trade, continues to bleed the Third World through domination by the multinational corporations and the thralldom of debt. *The world’s desperate need is for co-operative forms of production and distribution for the benefit of all. The capitalist system produces the precise opposite: it increasingly side-lines the vast majority of the world’s peoples, while further enriching the few who run it.*

In banking, insurance, stockbroking and the other leading financial institutions, at least 30m well-educated people world-wide spend their entire working lives doing nothing more productive than shuffling figures and paperwork, for the ultimate benefit, primarily, of the elites who employ them. No matter how well-trained they may be, however, they cannot guide or control capitalism because of its mercurial characteristic, which results in unwanted and unpredictable booms and slumps.

During booms, elites put on so much financial fat that they can ride out the slumps with ease. Conversely, these ‘recessions’ cause havoc amongst the great majority, laying low whole industries and communities and throwing millions of workers on the scrap-heap. A hallmark of the money system is that funds are readily made available for useless activities such as making armaments or building unnecessary commercial buildings, yet are invariably in short supply when required for socially necessary projects such as housing, schools or hospitals. The built-in capitalist compulsion to maximise profits at all costs, compromises all worthwhile human endeavours, and even life itself. The money system pervades every aspect of our lives, and taints every-

thing it touches. The stupidity and divisiveness of capitalism constitute an affront to the dignity of mankind; the whole money system must be abandoned if the world is to survive.

Domination by elites

A tiny proportion of the world's peoples, with insatiable appetites for both power and money and with disregard for all else, are dragging down humanity and its habitat to the brink of societal and environmental collapse. Referring to isolationist First World enclaves, Maurice Strong warned: 'No place on the planet could remain an island of affluence in a sea of misery. We are either going to save the whole world or no one will be saved. One part of the world cannot live in an orgy of unrestrained consumption while the rest destroys its environment just to survive. No one is immune from the effects of the other.'² We have seen in Chapter 3 that domination by elites has led to the perpetuation of overblown nation-states, the stifling of innumerable separatist movements, and the paralysing of parliaments by tiny executives. To further consolidate their interests, the seamy world-wide bonds of wealth have developed naturally into unholy alliances of reactionary elites across both the Third and First Worlds.

A prime example of elitist megalomania is that of the US leadership in early 1990s. Ignoring totally global requests to moderate their inordinate pollution of the planet, President Bush stated bluntly: 'The US lifestyle is not negotiable.'

Having dismembered the old USSR to its satisfaction, the White House decided to turn to creating, unilaterally, a 'new world order', which made little pretence of furthering any nation's welfare other than its own. Paul Rogers commented:

The US foresees a very unstable world over the next 30 years, with bitter divisions of wealth and poverty, coupled with continued proliferation of advanced weapons, producing a dangerous world disorder. This, it is claimed, must require a military response, and the US will need to field the full range of forces, including the new nuclear weapons, primarily for use against China or other Third World targets, in order to maintain its wealth and security.³

Tragically, the baneful influence of the US elites is all too evident also within the United Nations organisation. As John Pilger explains:

The UN is dying. Some will argue that it was never much alive, but this is to underestimate the largely unseen work of the UN in fields that touch the lives of the majority of humanity. For example, the Centre for Science and Technology for Development has shown Third World governments that they need not be intimidated by foreign big business, and that there is a way to 'develop' other than by the cult of 'growth' and by plundering the earth. Such agencies have enjoyed support in the General Assembly, but members' voting patterns are now watched closely by the US, and governments seeking World Bank and IMF blessing dare not go against US wishes. Internal UN policy now is to kill off general research, policy studies or anything suggesting inter-governmental cooperation; the market lobbyists figure that with research eliminated, no one will notice problems like toxic wastes or dangerous pharmaceuticals.⁴

Weaponry

Clearing the decks for the introduction of an alternative world order must necessarily include the question of weapons, because their total elimination is fundamental to success: their existence is both a threat and an affront to humanity. *It is a grotesque contradiction that, on the one hand, man has developed innumerable possibilities for every human being to enjoy full, healthy and rewarding lives, and on the other hand, retains all the lethal paraphernalia for extinguishing those same lives.*

It is indisputable that the sole purpose of weapons - big or small - is to kill people; and

yet it is equally beyond dispute, that the overwhelming majority of human beings reject totally the very idea of killing anybody. So why then have any weapons at all? Further, it is becoming less usual to hear even the most reactionary leaders actually recommending going to war, and the ridiculous denunciation of opponents of such madness as ‘pacifists’ or ‘conscientious objectors’ is similarly dropping out of fashion. Most nations claim to support the principles of the United Nations, whose charter states unequivocally: ‘All members shall settle their disputes by peaceful means, including negotiation, mediation, conciliation and resort to regional settlement’. *So why then have any armed forces at all?*

The environment, populations, food

The many problems in these areas, referred to in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, would be alleviated dramatically by the elimination of the capitalist money system, and all the exploitation and unnatural pressures which stem from it. Judith Hampson reports: ‘The world’s indigenous peoples, original inhabitants of their ancestral lands, believe not that we inherited the earth from our forefathers, but that we have merely borrowed it from our descendants. Since we hold it in trust for them, it is our moral duty to preserve it.’⁵ Andrew Lees, of Friends of the Earth, commented: ‘The fate of the forests has become a symbol of the battle between North and South, a propaganda battle with each side blaming the other while the destruction continues...the US is playing political poker with the fate of the planet, and Britain is acting as its poodle.’⁶

To the many different existing threats to the environment which are already critical, must be added the likelihood of friction and destructive hostilities between ravenous First World consumers competing for control of diminishing natural resources, unless their exploitation world-wide can be planned and controlled co-operatively and rationally. The critical nature of the explosive growth of populations was summed up by the secretary-general at the opening of the 1992 Rio Earth conference: ‘*Populations must be stabilised, and rapidly...if we do not do it, nature will, and much more brutally. We have been the most successful species ever. We are now a species out of control.*’² One of the tragic examples of our being a ‘species out of control’ is the global predicament of agriculture. The growing and fair distribution of food has become a critical factor only because profit-hungry ‘agribusiness’ has been allowed to grab control in so much of the world.

Precedents for fundamental change

The elites and their media would have us believe that capitalism is a permanent part of the natural order of life on earth. To consolidate this myth, they have ensured that the tentacles of their money system reach out and penetrate virtually every daily activity of every individual in the First, and in increasing numbers in the Third World; we have seen the fateful results of these penetrations in Chapter 2. In promoting fundamental societal changes, it is apposite to recall some of the more important precedents which have proved that human existence can not only be maintained, but greatly enhanced in the absence of capitalism. After ridding themselves of their old orders, in, for example, China, the USSR and Cuba, it was demonstrated that, with all their deficiencies and the facing of enormous difficulties and opposition, highly impressive societal improvements could be made after abandoning capitalism.

In so far as the subject of fundamental change is ever discussed, the elites, fearful for their privileges, maintain that abandoning capitalism would have catastrophic results. The ‘upheaval’ involved would no doubt result in them losing their superfluous and unwarranted pleasures, but, for the teeming billions, the gains would in many cases include life itself; and in all cases, immeasurable improvements in the quality of their existence. In the 20th century alone, there have been very real and catastrophic

upheavals in the shape of horrendous wars, exterminations of populations, and other disasters. By comparison, to suggest that to transfer to a sane, peaceful form of society from the chaos of capitalism could be termed an 'upheaval' would be an insult to the memory of the many millions who suffered and died in those terrible events.

The condition of the world at the close of the 20th century is so critical that every facet of human society must be examined and improved at local, regional, and world levels; various proposals are advanced in Part Two below. However, it has become clear that if humanity is to survive, and if an alternative world is to function peacefully, constructively and for the benefit of all, certain fundamental changes are absolutely critical for success. First, a fully democratic, alternative world can only be founded on the genuine equality of all men, women and young people of all races, exercising maximum self-governance at all levels. The existing, almost universal practice of domination at every level by very small groups, usually men, who owe their privileged positions too often to accidents of birth or wealth, must be relegated to history; the very concept of elitism is humiliating, and degrading to human nature. *Of paramount importance for a successful Alternative World is the total and permanent rejection of capitalism.*

1 *Guardian* 27/9/91

2 Ditto 4/6/92

3 Ditto 2/7/92

4 *New Statesman* 10/7/92

5 *Observer* 7/6/92

6 *Guardian* 8/6/92