

# INTRODUCTION

**by Christopher Hill**

When I first read Nares Craig's *Alternative World* I was very impressed by its all-embracing scope, its wide humanity and its implicit call for action to deal with the crisis which he showed to be approaching for humanity. His analysis of the threats to the human race and the world seem to me not overstated.

His book deserves the serious attention of all of us. Its thesis is that for five centuries the powerful nations of the First World have used their military might to exploit the Third World, reducing its populations to poverty and degradation by looting and enslavement. The establishment of independent states in what used to be colonies, by what Craig calls 'one of the greatest confidence tricks in history', has as its consequence control of the trade of the 'independent' nations of the Third World by small minorities in the First World who cream off the profits. What we think of as 'improvements' - scientific and technological advances - have in fact not improved the condition of humanity as a whole. That the condition of the majority in the Third World has deteriorated is the well-documented argument of chapters one to eight of this provocative book, backed up by much factual evidence and horrifying statistics. In terms of mere human justice, Craig insists, the imbalance created between the First and Third Worlds during these five centuries should be reduced. The First World owes a vast debt to the peoples of the Third World.

But this is more than a question of justice. This is not a starry-eyed book. Craig's conclusion is that, after centuries of exploitation of the Third World, both it and the First World are in consequence seriously sick. A real possibility exists that this illness may prove terminal unless drastic and immediate changes are made. Despite technological and scientific advances, and increases in knowledge, the condition of humanity as a whole has deteriorated over the past five centuries. When Christianity was forced upon the native peoples of America and elsewhere, it was argued that it was only right that they should pay for the inestimable benefits of being introduced to true religion. And pay they did, gratefully or not. But Christianity has not solved the Third World's problems. Over large areas of the globe, resources are misused because there is no overall planning - wanton destruction of forests, for instance, world-wide soil erosion, an uncontrolled population explosion which threatens natural resources in many areas. 'Countless millions live in absolute poverty and suffer the agony of diseases from malnutrition and death by starvation.' Money-making is the only genuinely world-wide religion of today.

Craig's figures are alarming. Average education expenditure per child in the poorest Third World countries is 2 dollars per annum, as compared with \$6,000 per annum in the First World. Illiteracy is increasing in the Third World by 25 million a year. Women and children have no rights in most Third World countries. 50% of the fortunate few who achieve higher education migrate from the Third to the First World, taking their expertise with them. If this process continues unchecked, Craig foresees escalating ecological disasters which, 'sooner or later will lead to explosive revolts by the have-nots, with unpredictable consequences'. Military rule, thought control through the media, denial of human rights, terror, are all employed by the elites who rule the independent Third World ex-colonies.

The second half of the book (Chapters 9 to 18) outlines what Craig considers the solutions necessary if civilisation is to survive. Some of them may seem utopian in present circumstances. Craig wants to force his readers to recognise the disastrous conse-

quences for the future of the human race if we fail to take decisive remedial action in the immediate future. We must, he insists, start thinking seriously about the alternative possibilities facing humanity if it is to survive. And we must not only think but act.

There have been prophets of doom in all ages, but few have argued their case so clearly and convincingly as Craig in his Conclusion. He puts the case for 'an alternative world, consisting of cooperative societies based on true, fully democratic socialist principles...renouncing individualism' and 'working together for the equitable use of resources to provide good lives for all.' The World Council of Churches has said that 'the amoral, wasteful and cruel system of capitalism' is 'the root cause of the poverty and powerlessness of the majority of the people.' We cannot afford it any longer.

Craig faces head on the facile view that the collapse of East European regimes proves the superiority of the free market to socialism. On the contrary: the Russian Revolution came in the most backward European country, the last one would have chosen in which to try out an experiment in socialism. Nevertheless, with all its defects, the USSR. produced many great achievements in education and science. The resistance of its people to the onslaught of Hitler's armies contributed decisively to the final defeat of fascism.

The proposals in this book call for serious discussion among democrats everywhere, since world-wide agreement will be needed for their implementation. Planned development for a 'world without money' will not be accepted without long and divisive arguments against those who benefit by the present system, or lack of it. 'Alternative energy policies', however rational, will be opposed by powerful vested interests. 'The only lesson of history', cynics have said, 'is that the lessons of history are never learnt until too late.'

The main theme of this book I find unanswerable. Capitalism has many achievements to its credit, but these very achievements now call for a decisive reorganisation of society. Competitive capitalism is now causing more harm than good to humanity; the future must lie with more democratic forms of organisation, capable of collectively planning world development to meet the impending crisis which Craig has depicted. But the democratic transformation of society will be a hazardous, long-term and difficult task. With control of all the organs of information and persuasion - press, TV etc - in the hands of rulers of the First World, how is this transformation to be achieved?

If Craig is right in supposing that the future of human life on earth as we know it is at stake, the answer is clear and it is a challenge to all of us. The programme for immediate action set out in Craig's Conclusion is very ambitious. However it comes, the transformation will meet with widespread resistance from powerful groups in both Worlds. To take only one example, the abolition of all armed forces and weapons in all nations by January 2001 AD is a very sensible idea, but it will be opposed not only on 'patriotic' grounds but also by all those who make vast profits out of arms production and sales.

On rational grounds Craigs programme seems incontrovertible, but how are we to implement it? How, in the first instance, do we get it discussed all over the world? Or do we decide that he is asking too much of us, and that the world may survive for our life-time: posterity can look to itself? Over to us.