

PREFACE

The motivation for writing this book was the belief that the world is so seriously sick, in so many different respects, that its illness will soon become terminal, unless fundamental changes are made. The aim has been to help strengthen the resolve of the many dedicated men, women and young persons world-wide already involved in numerous ways with averting further decline, and promoting progress. Part One summarises the most serious threats to humanity and our world, as a reminder of the various evils which need to be consigned to history. Part Two provides a picture of the practical realities of how life could be transformed for the world's peoples, if only pressures for change were to be successful.

In spite of the impression of improvements created by technological advances, the condition of humanity overall has actually deteriorated throughout recent times. This is evidenced most critically by the plight of disadvantaged people everywhere, often 'living' in conditions of such degradation that most First World citizens cannot conceive them as being possible in which to exist. Countless millions suffer the agony of diseases from malnutrition and death by starvation.

Younger people, faced with all the uncertainties of the 21st century, are entitled to ask those who have experienced most of the 20th 'What went wrong, and what kind of alternative, better world can we help to construct?'

Armed conflicts continue to plague the world, compounding its many problems. The need for universal, lasting peace has never been greater, and is fundamental to the creation of an alternative world, in which the idea of resorting to force would be inadmissible. In the words of Rousseau: 'War is the man-made institution which makes one ashamed of being a man.'

Leaving aside the threat of wars, the greatest obstacles to humanity's progress are traditions, and perhaps the most damaging of all is the deep-seated concept of 'them' and 'us'. World-wide, children are taught, and too many adults accept, that 'they' are 'well-born', better educated, and therefore bound to be right. This is in spite of the chaotic state of affairs that those in authority have either wilfully promoted or allowed the world to slip into by default.

Traditions are fundamental to perpetuating the status quo, and have thus been nurtured for centuries by the elites of this world. Of course, many traditions relating to honest, helpful human behaviour are important and must be preserved. But those traditions which are harmful include emphases on the roles of monarchies and elites generally, acceptance of armed forces and therefore wars as normal and even glorious, and respect for the wealthy with disdain for the poverty-stricken. Further negative, ingrained concepts include individualism, male superiority, 'might is right', the sovereignty of states, and national chauvinism.

The aim of this book is to make the case for an alternative world consisting of cooperative societies, based on true, fully democratic socialist principles. In this context, it is necessary to comment on the collapse of the 'Socialist Sixth of the World' as it was referred to, with optimism, in the title of the famous book, published in 1939 by Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury. First, capitalist societies, going their own 'free-for-all', individualistic and competitive ways, demand few organisational efforts by anyone; in fact, the free market protagonists deliberately eschew planning of any kind as bordering on the unethical.

By contrast, cooperative societies call for dedicated, intelligent and patient leadership efforts, to guide people towards renouncing individualism, with its lure of disproportionate rewards for the few, and instead, to lead them towards working together for the

equitable use of resources and optimal lives for all. Not surprisingly, such high quality leadership was never available in sufficient numbers in what had been the vast ill-educated tsarist empire, nor later in Eastern Europe. Thus followed the inevitable gravitation towards central control, giving rise to, at best, state rather than democratic socialism.

In fact, the first attempt to create a socialist society took place in what was probably the most inauspicious environment of all. Furthermore, from the outset, the Soviet Union was hounded by the rest of the world, both militarily and economically. The final factors contributing to eventual failure were the insuperable difficulties facing the various central leaderships in coping with such a plethora of cultural, linguistic, agricultural, climatic, industrial and many other problems over such a huge area, spanning seven time zones. However, it is important not to forget that the USSR did produce many achievements in the educational, scientific, construction and other fields. The Soviet Union also withstood almost the entire weight of Hitler's armies, at the cost of 20 million dead and unprecedented destruction of productive capacity, and played a key role in the final defeat of Hitler.

The author rejects the currently fashionable view that events in Eastern Europe have proved the 'free market' to be the only viable form of economy. On the contrary, capitalism itself is proving to be an amoral, wasteful and cruel system which the world can ill afford to retain any longer. This view is very well borne out by the following excerpt from a statement in 1988 by the World Council of Churches:

We personally see and experience the reality of poverty, powerlessness and death that is imposed on the majority of the world's peoples by the economic systems that are maintained by and serve an extremely powerful minority. The capitalist system, which controls both the First and the Third Worlds, is the root cause of the poverty and powerlessness of the majority of the people.¹

Morality has now sunk to an all-time low, with the promotion of money-making by any means to the status of the only genuinely world-wide religion. In its name, ethics give way to profits. Compounding the ongoing human tragedies, there will be continuing ecological disasters resulting mainly from First World greed and, sooner or later, some forms of explosive revolts by the have-nots, with unpredictable consequences. Those ruthless elites, dedicated only to preserving their own lifestyles, should pause to think through the horrendous results of their misdeeds and *laissez-faire* attitudes, which will almost inevitably rebound on their own offspring, if not on themselves.

It is frustrating enough to know that there are very many progressively minded men and women around the globe whose talents are unused, who could well, given the chance, run a vastly better alternative world; we can but hope the younger ones may still get that opportunity. That frustration is increased, for our generation, by the prospect of leaving the world in a worse state than when we entered it. Thus it seemed that writing this book represented the natural task to attempt.

¹ Campaign Group News, February 1989

Abbreviations in text

1m... one million

1bn... one billion (1,000 million)

pa ... per annum

GNP... gross national product

SU... USSR before 1991

UK... United Kingdom

US... United States of America. Note: It is important to emphasise the correct definition of the territory between Canada and Mexico. In recent years the term 'America' has become increasingly synonymous with just the US, which is naturally resented by many other countries within the two American continents.

Endnotes are at the end of each chapter in Part One and at the end of Chapter 18 in Part Two.