

The following article is reprinted from the April issue of the Stanford Alumni Almanac. The article represents at least one radical's criticisms of contemporary American society and his hopes for the future. It should be made clear at the outset that the views presented below are those of the author alone, although I am sure that these sentiments are shared by most of the members of Stanford SDS. It is hoped that this article will provoke some fruitful discussion between radicals and liberals in the next few days.

TOWARD A NEW SOCIETY

by Jim Shoch, Stanford SDS

To detail SDS's analysis of American society and its flaws, as well as our vision of the future, is a tall order in this short a space. Nevertheless it is a worthwhile one, for an understanding of the politics and goals of the radical left is an essential prerequisite for the comprehension of the events occurring today in the ghettos and on the university campuses.

Our fundamental premise is that America is ruled by and for a single class. This stratum—whether it is called the "ruling class," the "governing class," the "corporate bourgeoisie," or the "ruling elite"—is the sector comprised of the .5 percent of the population that controls 25 percent of the nation's wealth. From these ranks are drawn the leaders of the giant multinational corporations that run the economy and the men who control the governmental apparatus. A survey of the backgrounds of the higher echelon members of the executive branch of the government reveals a predominant number of ex-corporate chieftains and associated lawyers as well as bankers. Through its control of the executive branch, the regulatory agencies, and government expenditures, this ruling class consolidates and extends its control and preserves the financial health of its corporations.

The ruling elite's wealth, of course, is based on these great corporations and banks. American industry today is characterized by a few large producers in each branch of industry who agree to inflated price levels to ensure a high and constant rate of profit at the expense of the millions of American workers and consumers. Besides depriving the working man of the product of his labor, this great concentration of wealth and power naturally produces at the base of the economic pyramid some forty million people living below the poverty level defined by the U.S. government, and another forty million persons living below the level of income defined as adequate to preserve a standard of "health and decency." It has been estimated that the retransfer of some \$11 billion of income each year would raise every family's income above the poverty line, but somehow this step just hasn't been taken yet. Clearly, the existence of poverty in America today is senseless and indefensible.

Monopoly capitalism is also in part responsible for the oppression of black people in this country. It is mainly the big banks and insurance companies that own most of the wretched ghetto tenements for which the inhabitants pay such exorbitant rents. The inadequate job opportunities and job-training programs for black slum-dwellers are largely the fault of the corporations who find that giving hope and dignity to the unemployed is unprofitable. And besides, a black industrial reserve army helps depress the level

of wages in these inflationary times. The Urban Coalition seems designed to buy peace in the ghettos with a token amount of funds, for the size of the investment that would be necessary to completely eliminate discrimination and inequality would clearly be found to be unappetizing by the major corporations.

BOMBS OR SCHOOLS

American businessmen and politicians are fond of citing our \$800 billion Gross National Product as proof of the nation's prosperity. But a closer look at the composition of this figure can be quite disconcerting. Ten percent of this GNP as well as ten percent of the nation's employment is due solely to military expenditures. Ghetto redevelopment would provide a perfectly adequate outlet for government funds to keep the economy running in its smooth Keynesian fashion, but such projects would compete with private developers who have plans to build middle- and high-income housing units in former slum areas. Recently, a \$40 million rat control bill was laughed out of Congress, while the proposed ABM system, in the face of almost unanimous opposition by the scientific community, may well be approved. Congress may pick the annual budget to pieces, but proposed Defense Department appropriations always seem to breeze right through. But then, bombs depreciate a good deal faster than schools. The huge war-based firms of the "military-industrial complex" exert a powerful lobbying force on government officials, and the result is a senseless and destructive arms race in the face of widespread domestic poverty. As rich as America may be, she cannot afford both guns and butter, as some would have us believe.

American monopoly capitalism is irrational in other respects, too. To support the great automobile firms in Detroit as well as the giant oil companies, the government builds miles of highways and expressways resulting in smog that is now becoming a real health hazard. The development of the electric car and good public transportation has been retarded; but, then, what would this country be without Standard Oil and General Motors?

To ensure an adequate consumer demand, vast amounts of money are spent each year on advertising and selling costs, on packaging, and on the marginal differentiation of products. In addition, obsolescence is now built into cars, nylons, razor blades, light bulbs, and who knows what else, all to preserve a high volume of sales. The poor of this country may need food and clothing, but as they don't have the money to pay for these items, the corpora-

tions, through the mass media, create the drive toward conspicuous consumption in the more moneyed sectors that leads them to purchase expensive luxuries as well as all kinds of useless gadgets.

An economic system with the productive potential that ours has, and yet which uses this capacity to produce bombs and useless goods, can only be described as monstrous and irrational.

The constantly growing American corporations and banks are not restricted within national boundaries. These firms are penetrating further and further into the underdeveloped world in search of raw materials, markets for surplus goods, and outlets for surplus capital. Direct private U.S. foreign investment today totals some \$56 billion, and roughly 40 percent of this is located in the Third World. Europe has recently begun to decry the American takeover of the advanced sectors of its economies, but American control of the underdeveloped nations is far greater.

U.S. firms invest largely in the extractive industries—petroleum, mining, and agriculture. This has resulted in lopsided growth for the developing nations. The underdeveloped countries have become dependent on the export of a single commodity, such as coffee, bananas, or copper, and they must buy the great bulk of their manufactured goods from the advanced industrial nations. The terms of trade in this exchange are continually worsening for the nations of the Third World. As American firms shift more toward investment in manufacturing enterprises overseas, in order to more efficiently exploit the local market, they monopolize the technology and technical know-how. By tying up local capital, they prevent the development of an autonomous national bourgeoisie capable of independently developing the nation's resources for its own internal use. Profits that are badly needed for reinvestment to promote growth in the host country are largely remitted to the United States. Extensive foreign interests, in alliance with local commercial and landed oligarchies, guarantee a stunted and deformed growth for the emerging nations.

To maintain a favorable investment climate throughout the Third World for its multinational corporations, the U.S. government—in contradiction to its supposed ideal of supporting only democratic governments through its economic and especially military aid—backs dictatorial military regimes capable of repressing threats to American vested interests. These regimes are, in fact, able and willing to repress all movements to bring about social reform. Any movement or government that is somewhat socialist in nature and which seems to threaten American interests is immediately labeled as "Communist," and pressure is brought to bear against it by the United States government. This pressure may take the form of the approval of an impending right-wing military coup, as in Brazil in 1964; the use of CIA agents to bring down a reformist regime, as in Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954; or the actual deployment of troops to suppress a nationalist social revolution, as in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and currently in Vietnam.

The American ruling class equates "free enterprise" with "freedom," and attempts to impose its socio-economic system on the rest of the world. Thus has America become the world's leading counterrevolu-

tionary power, brutally trying to repress the great struggle of the Vietnamese who are attempting to work out their own destinies free from foreign domination and exploitation. This country, supposedly dedicated to freedom and self-determination, vitiates these ideals by denying their realization to the Vietnamese in the furtherance of the vested interests of a relative handful of Americans involved in the exploitation of Southeast Asia and in the military machine. The death and oppression that results *must* be intolerable to every feeling human being.

A system that subordinates human needs and dignity to the accumulation of profits, as does American capitalism, necessarily produces in its pursuit of misplaced priorities needless poverty and oppression at home as well as death and destruction abroad.

CAPITALISM & UNIVERSITIES

American universities are integral parts of American monopoly capitalism. As industry increasingly employs more advanced types of technology, it also requires a more skilled labor force. Since an individual scientist or executive may leave or be lured from one firm to a higher paying job with another firm, individual corporations prefer not to risk the large amounts of capital necessary to train completely all of their technicians and managers. And so, the universities have become the centers of production of skilled manpower, both technical and administrative, which the corporations utilize. In addition, costly research or research that may not be of immediate use is also done at the universities, the results of which are then eagerly pounced upon by the corporations. Universities do an important part of the Defense Department's war research in this country, which is of great benefit to the mammoth corporations of the "military-industrial complex." Finally, universities are powerful agencies of socialization, fostering on the part of the students values and attitudes leading them willingly to embrace the American "free enterprise" system as the only politico-socio-economic arrangement that can truly promote political freedom. Thus, American universities are vital links in the production process.

Stanford fits the above description like a glove. It produces a great number of engineers and administrators for the corporations, and the war research done both on the campus and at the Stanford Research Institute, whose board of directors must be approved by this University's Trustees, has made Stanford the third leading defense contractor among universities. The Stanford Trustees are predominantly members of the American ruling class with connections to such war-dependent firms as General Dynamics, Lockheed, Northrop, and FMC, and these affiliations make it seem unlikely that the Trustees will ever willingly decide to terminate the war research done at Stanford.

SDS disrupted the Trustee meeting at the Faculty Club on January 14 mainly to expose to the community Stanford's exploitative involvement in Southeast Asia, an involvement that has developed to defend and extend the interests of the Stanford Trustees and men like them. We will continue to use whatever means we think are necessary and effective in shed-

ding further light on and eventually eliminating Stanford's participation in American militarism and imperialism.

We're often told that, as a group, we're merely destructive, that we never have any constructive alternatives to offer to the status quo. While more often than not this charge is an attempt to evade the issues at hand, some ideas as to what the "new society" would look like are absolutely essential. The details will, of course, have to be worked out in practice, but there are some general principles that can be laid out.

The new society, of course, will be a socialist one. The means of production will be taken from the small number of capitalists who now own them and will be run collectively in one form or another by the mass of Americans. The first major result of this will be a significant retransfer of income and wealth and the speedy elimination of poverty. A general overall plan formulated by duly-elected officials and with plenty of give and take up and down the line will ensure the production of goods that satisfy real human needs and which will not include implements of destruction and useless products for the affluent sectors of the population. Specifically, there would probably be fewer cars and hence less smog and fewer gas stations; fewer country clubs and more parks; fewer bombs and more schools. Private foreign investment would be eliminated, also eliminating a major reason for brutal U.S. interventionism in the Third World. In addition, the ideological basis of the Cold War would be in great part dissolved, easing East-West tensions.

THE SOCIALIST SOCIETY

A prime concern of this socialist society would be, of course, the maximization of individual freedom. Those who say that any kind of planned society inevitably limits this freedom are forgetting the fact that major corporate directors and executives are the only men currently making decisions in the realm of the economy. Under socialism, much of this decision-making would be greatly decentralized. While such fields as communications and transportation probably would be centrally administered, other industries could be run on the state level, and the great bulk of American enterprise could be run at the local level. Workers in a particular factory will decide as to what methods of production will be used. Workers will ac-

tively participate in the investment planning in their factories. Workers and consumers, with the advice of the central planning agency, could collectively determine the price of goods to be sold on a local basis. The central bureaucracy will be restricted and carefully supervised by the electorate to prevent the emergence of an entrenched political elite. Far more than ever before would the average citizen participate in decisions affecting his life. This would be democracy in the true sense, not the "liberal" democracy we now know in which freedom is restricted to voting every few years for the mediocrities of someone else's choice.

Those who point out that a democratic socialism has never really existed in an industrial society are right—yet there is no reason to fear a Stalinist type of despotism here for three main reasons. First, unlike Russia, we have a tradition of *political* democracy and civil liberties which the American people simply would not see destroyed. Second, unlike the Soviet Union in the 1930s, the United States is already an advanced industrial society. The strict regimentation of economic and political life that is necessary to achieve rapid development would be unnecessary in this country. And third, the Soviet Union had to develop in the face of an often hostile West, which helped to produce a repressive militarization of the economy. This is a problem we would not have to face after the transition to socialism. Everything in the United States favors the construction of a truly democratic, participatory form of socialism.

Perhaps most important, through a reorientation of the educational system and the communications media as well as the restructuring of the economy, a new set of values would develop. The satisfaction of real needs and not the maximization of profits would become the goal of human endeavor. The competitive capitalist ethic would be replaced by the ethic of cooperation. Individuals would work collectively to advance their own welfare and the welfare of all mankind. Self-realization would be achieved not through isolated, individual toil, but in a community, with all members as full and active participants. Human relations would cease to be mere market transactions entered for individual gain. As El-dridge has written, "Competition is the law of the jungle; cooperation is the law of civilization." It is to the construction of this truly human, humane civilization that we are dedicated. ■