

CONTRIBUTORS **OPINION**

Old-school capitalism isn't the best system to deal with climate change

No capitalist nation is achieving what is necessary to avoid the Earth becoming uninhabitable, Dennis Raphael and Toba Bryant write.

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We must either move forward into socialism or fall back into barbarism — Karl Kautsky, 1882

An aura of crisis envelops Canada. We see crises in housing, food, income, jobs, health care and the environment. Canada has always fallen short compared to most wealthy nations in providing its citizens with the income and social security necessary for health and well-being. This has much to do with Canada's history of dominance by business-oriented political parties and its weak organized labour sector and marginalized social democratic political parties. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these deficiencies.

For many years, we believed that social democratic-oriented Nordic nations and progressive conservative Continental nations could serve as models for Canada to emulate. Clearly, living and working conditions in these nations are superior to what is seen in Canada. Their income and other inequalities, poverty, and housing and food insecurity rates are lower than ours. Is such a future possible for Canada under current political and economic conditions?

We now think this is not possible. Instead of Canadian governments passing laws and regulations to improve living and working conditions through redistribution of income and wealth, workplace regulation, and provision of social and health programs, we see attempted crackdown on labour rights and imposition of austerity on the vulnerable as the value of financial stocks — held primarily by the wealthy — continue to rise. Is there no alternative to our present economic system that sees power, influence and wealth increasingly concentrated among the owners and managers of the corporate and business sector to the detriment of most Canadians?

We believe there is. Increasingly, Canadians recognize that our economic system is the root of many of our problems. A 2019 Forum poll found 58 per cent of Canadians held positive views toward socialism, with only 40 per cent holding negative opinions. There is also growing support for economic transformation. In 2021, an Innovative Research Group poll showed 53 per cent of Canadians supported the radical transformation of the economy and 35 per cent supported shifting away from a capitalist model. What would such a post-capitalist society look like?

Here we agree with China Meville who in "A Spectre Haunting" argues what is needed is humility; an acceptance that we cannot be sure of what socialism will look like, and that on the way there we will make mistakes. In the end, however, we agree with Meville that socialism "would give an infinitely greater likelihood of sustaining a habitable world than more of the same system that got us here."

This view is increasingly mainstream. Canadian environmentalists Naomi Klein and Dimitri Lascaris, and labour activist Andrew Jackson challenge an economic system whose reliance on capital accumulation and profit making by the one per cent through unregulated economic growth, are detrimental to the health and well-being of the majority.

But the greatest justification for a post-capitalist society is the environmental crisis. No capitalist nation is achieving what is necessary to avoid the Earth becoming uninhabitable. Canadian political economist William Carroll in “Regime of Obstruction: How Corporate Power Blocks Energy Democracy” lays out the means of surviving not only the environmental crisis, but other crises caused by unfettered capitalism which benefits the powerful and wealthy at the expense of the majority:

“Unless we are able to replace corporate power with a participatory-democratic alternative that meets people’s needs while healing the Earth, capitalism’s ecocidal logic will continue to determine the contours of our lives. And the climate crisis will continue to spin out of control – to our common peril. The stakes are high; the time is short.”

The uncertainty of our future post-capitalist economic system should not be a cause for despair, but rather for hope. As Canadian socialist Tommy Douglas famously implored us: “Courage, my friends; ’tis not too late to build a better world.”

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