

The alternative to capitalism is simple

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- Basil Brown, President: New Unity Movement, Port Elizabeth



WORKING-CLASS LIFE: Mine workers wearing face masks arrive ahead of their shift at a Sibanye-Stillwater mine in Carletonville in Gauteng

The letters from Hamilton Petersen of January 4 and Charles Wait of January 6 in The Herald have reference.

This correspondence raises very vital questions that need to be addressed.

The letter by Petersen stated that “only the eradication of capitalism can usher in a non-racial society”.

In response, Wait plaintively asks the writer to “please provide alternatives to capitalism, in particular where these evils are absent and are not replaced by other socioeconomic problems”.

The answer is quite simple. The alternative to capitalism is socialism!

Socialism, which is a system predicated on caring and sharing, offers humankind the best hope for a future where the development and prosperity of all people are achieved.

One suspects that Wait, who is emeritus professor of economics at NMU, supports the battle cry by neo-liberal capitalism of: “There Is No Alternative” (Tina), introduced by Britain’s Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.

Instead of acknowledging that all the evils that Petersen alludes to are caused by or are inherent in the system of capitalism, he asks Petersen to provide him with an alternative to this evil system.

However, the question posed by Wait begs answers especially in the context of a world which is at this time beset by combating the ravages of the Covid-19 pandemic and an economic recession, both of which have devastated the lives mostly of workers all over the world.

Wait’s assertion that the use of the term “worker” is a misnomer is surprising given that as an economist he must be au fait with the terminology used in political science.

It is absurd for Wait to assert that CEOs of corporations should be considered workers in this context.

To put things into perspective, capitalism is a political and economic system in which the owners of capital and the means of production (mines, factories, farms and so on) exploit the labour of workers for profit.

Petersen avers, correctly, that all the evils of capitalism including racism can only be eradicated if that system itself is eradicated.

Marx taught us that the only class capable of achieving this is the working class.

However, as Petersen suggests, the workers lack a consciousness of themselves as a class, hence his injunction that the role of the left is to find ways and means of raising class consciousness among workers.

I think that the point made by Petersen is that workers need to develop a sense of themselves as a class acting in opposition to the ruling class or bourgeoisie.

However, instilling this class consciousness in workers is no easy task.

A key role player in fulfilling this task is the trade union movement, acting in concert with the broad political left, which is comprised of organisations and individuals who believe in and espouse socialism, anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism.

Sadly the trade union movement in SA is in disarray and has largely failed the workers in this respect.

It is therefore the task of the left to develop tactics and strategies and to formulate demands which promote the interests of workers which, acting in their own class interests, lead the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism.

Capitalism with its mindless drive for growth at all costs has become a major burden to society, globally.

If allowed to continue along its reckless path of “Accumulate! Accumulate! Accumulate!” we will see accelerating economic crises as well as viral pandemics and the irreversible breakdown of the natural world.