

# Reply to a reader's questions on socialist program

26 June 2000

Hi,

I attended the Melbourne Uni lecture by Nick Beams. I'm currently becoming more politically active and I'm researching various parties and policies, researching in general. I just wanted to thank the socialist party for organising the lecture and I'd like to make a couple of comments.

During the question/answer session, a number of people asked about what alternative system the socialist party has. Nick pointed out that we can't talk about an alternative until the workers are in power, and only then will a system be in place to work out an alternative.

From a voter's point of view, this doesn't help at all. The socialist party will need to have an alternative system to 'sell'. People like to know what they're in for. I'm just wondering if you have any material about this? I.e.—what the world would be like under socialist governments?

Also, I notice in your 'other languages' section, you list 'Serbo-Croat'. Since the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, using 'Serbo-Croat' to describe Serbian and Croatian may offend the sensitivities of some readers (my parents are Croatian, and I know it would offend them). It may be a prudent move to have them under separate titles and perhaps even go as far as having translators familiar with each language to write the translation (there are subtle differences that each nationality can pick up). It may be pedantic, but it'll mean certain individuals will be more open to the literature.

Thanks again.

TM

Dear TM,

Thank you for your e-mail on the recent lecture by Nick Beams entitled, *Globalisation: The Socialist Perspective*. You write that Beams did not outline in detail what a socialist society would be like.

In fact, he dealt with the most essential point of all: that a socialist economy would ensure the use of the vast productive and technological resources on the basis of human need. Humanity's social resources would be freed from the domination of the logic of the profit system.

You will recall that the issue arose in a number of questions about the degradation of the environment. Beams pointed out that the solutions to many of these problems have already been devised. In other words, the central problem is not a technical but a social one. It is simply impossible to undertake rational production where the decisions are made in accordance not with human needs, including the need to maintain the natural environment, but are determined by the requirements of profit.

Beams explained that developments under capitalism, though in embryonic form, establish how it will be possible to organise a socialist society. Perhaps you remember him describing how items purchased in one corner of the globe can be monitored in another continent due to computerisation. He was using this example to show how the majority of people could, using the latest communication technology, have direct input into the running of a socialist economy.

He also pointed out that transnational companies operate in a highly planned way and that within the framework of their own organisation their operations are worked out to the minutest detail. Of course once the commodity is finished it has to be sold and then it is subject to the fluctuations of the capitalist market. Again, the point was that as far as planning on a global scale is concerned, it is already taking place within the operations of transnational companies.

While giving a general guide as to how a socialist society would operate, neither Beams nor anyone else is able to elaborate a "blueprint" of what a socialist society would look like. After all, this is, in the final analysis, going to rest with the democratic decisions of the mass of the population who will decide social priorities and elect representative committees, working parties etc., to put forward proposals on the many questions posed to society as a whole.

Nick Beams elaborates on this in correspondence with a reader that can be found at:

<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/mar2000/corr-m04.shtml>

Also on this theme:

<http://www.wsws.org/articles/1998/sep1998/plan-s03.shtml>

The Utopian Socialists of the late 1700s and early 1800s

that preceded Marx, worked out ideal societies down to the last detail. As Engels wrote in *Anti-Duhring*: “The solution of the social problems, which as yet lay hidden in undeveloped economic conditions, the utopians attempted to evolve out of the human brain...These new social systems were foredoomed as utopian; the more completely they were worked out in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting off into pure fantasies”. Engels goes on to describe that the utopians were utopians because within their contemporary society, they could not extrapolate the formation of a new society because the elements for this were too undeveloped.

Marx in his exhaustive analysis of capitalist society demonstrated that the economic development of capitalism lays the basis for the foundations of the socialisation of the means of production.

He recognised that the contradictions between the social character of production and the private ownership of the means of production by the capitalist class, as well as the development of the world economy and the division of the world into rival nation-states would lead towards crisis. Socialism was therefore a necessary outcome of the structure of capitalist society, for humanity's progressive development to proceed.

You say in your e-mail that from a voters' point of view, “The socialist party will need to have an alternative system to ‘sell’”. It is important to understand that the Socialist Equality Party is not “selling” a vision in order to be elected. Our task is not to develop an election platform, but rather to develop a socialist movement, to re-arm the working class with a political perspective. Certainly this program will be advanced at elections, but the re-organisation of society can only be undertaken through a deep-going struggle that directly challenges the profit system and all the political conceptions that maintain it.

In other words, the SEP sees its central task as the political education of the working class—so that wider and wider layers of workers understand the nature of the capitalist system, as well as the possibility and necessity for socialism. Trotsky's *In Defence of Marxism*, explains that the party of the proletariat is not like other parties—the parties of the “bourgeois horse-traders and petty-bourgeois rag-patchers”—but is engaged in the preparation of the working class for the socialist revolution and the regeneration of mankind on new material and moral foundations.

As Marx explained in the *Communist Manifesto*, a socialist perspective is not the whim of this or that individual, rather: “The theories of the communists are not in any way based upon ideas or principles discovered or established by this or that universal reformer”. Marx continues, “They serve merely to express in general terms the concrete circumstances of an actually existing class struggle, of a

historical movement that is going on under our very eyes”.

You also mentioned that perhaps we should change the title of our Serbo-Croat section so that it does not offend the national feelings of both Serbs and Croats.

In the absence of a broad-based socialist movement, the world economic crisis has seen the development of many ethno-communal disputes. Nowhere have the reactionary implications of nationalism been so exposed as in the Balkans. The horrors of inter-communal conflicts have cost the lives of tens of thousands and undermined the social, economic and cultural level of the people of the region.

Every reactionary in the Balkans has sought to split the working class on national lines, using differences in language, script, religious faith etc., to inflame divisions between people who formerly lived, married and worked together in the preceding period.

The fact that in the not-so-distant past it would not have raised an eye-lid to have written an analysis in Serbo-Croatian surely underscores the necessity for the unification of the workers of this region.

The drive to separation has served the interests of a small layer of the petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie as they fight to grab greater amounts of turf to establish the best vantage point in their dealings with transnational companies. This has been to the vast detriment of the working class as a whole.

Perhaps you would be interested in reading one of the major articles written on the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, entitled, *After the Slaughter: Political Lessons of the Balkan War* which can be found at:

<http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/jun1999/balk-j14.shtml>

You will find a listing of the articles on the World Socialist Website dealing with the Balkans at:

<http://www.wsws.org/sections/category/news/eu-balk.shtml>

As you can see, the questions you have raised are crucial in understanding a socialist perspective. We would welcome further discussion with you on these and any other issues.

As far as our literature is concerned, the book *Globalisation and the International Working Class*, deals with many of these issues, as well as the *World Socialist Website Review* magazines.

Yours sincerely,

Will Marshall



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**[wsws.org/contact](http://www.wsws.org/contact)**