

BBC poll shows widespread disaffection with capitalism

Julie Hyland**12 November 2009**

A global poll by the British Broadcasting Corporation's World Service shows widespread disaffection with the capitalist free market, including a significant opposition to capitalism per se.

Conducted by GlobeScan/PIPA, the poll interviewed more than 29,000 people in 27 countries, between June 19 and October 13, 2009. These were in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Panama, Costa Rica, Chile, Australia, Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, India, Pakistan, China, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, France, Italy, the UK, Spain, Nigeria, Egypt and Kenya.

The poll found that more than three in five respondents were opposed to free-market capitalism. Some 89 percent believed that capitalism was not working, with a majority of those questioned in 22 of the countries indicating strong support for government intervention to support greater regulation of business and the market, in favour of a more socially equitable division of wealth.

Almost a quarter of respondents believed that capitalism should be replaced by a "different system."

The BBC reported, "If there is one issue where a global consensus seems to emerge from the survey it is this: there are majorities almost everywhere wanting government to be more active in regulating business."

In only two countries, the United States and Pakistan, did more than one in five people believe the current economic system was working. A majority in 22 of the 27 countries supported greater wealth redistribution—67 percent or an average of two out of three people. In 17 of these countries, a majority responded that they wanted greater regulation of big business. In 15 of these, especially in Russia, the Ukraine, Brazil, Indonesia and France, the majority were in favour of government being more active in owning or controlling major industries.

Twenty-three percent believed capitalism was "fatally flawed." An almost equal number of people questioned in France felt that capitalism had failed (43 percent), responding that its inadequacies could be resolved by greater

regulation and reforms (47 percent). After France, the highest numbers supporting the replacement of capitalism were in Mexico (38 percent) and Brazil (35 percent). In the 12 countries highlighted on the BBC website, more than 10 percent in each nation supported this position. Those defending the present set-up were a minority in every instance.

The survey threw up several statistical anomalies. German respondents recorded less support for the view that capitalism had failed than in the US for example. Nonetheless, the majority in each instance—almost 70 percent in the US and more than 80 percent in Germany—registered their disapproval with the status quo.

Responses as to whether the dissolution of the Soviet Union was "a good thing" were less surprising, with the US, Canada, west and central Europe, and Australia showing a majority in favour (between 73 to 81 percent). In those countries that had felt more directly the impact of the USSR's dissolution in terms of their living standards, the loss of political and economic backing or where it was widely viewed as an alternative to capitalism, the trend was the reverse. Some 61 percent of Russians and 54 percent of Ukrainians felt it had a negative impact, as did the majority of those in Pakistan and Egypt. According to the BBC, "Almost seven in 10 Egyptians say the end of the Soviet Union was a bad thing and views are sharply divided in India, Kenya and Indonesia."

Overall, a narrow majority (54 percent) of 15 countries polled said the break-up of the USSR was positive, while 24 percent said they did not know.

The poll was timed to coincide with celebrations marking 20 years since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, which saw overturns of nationalised property relations across eastern Europe and the Soviet Union—presided over by the Stalinist bureaucracy, now become the nascent capitalist class, under Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin.

The BBC commented that in 1989 it had appeared that free-market capitalism had emerged triumphant from the Cold

War. Now, however, GlobeScan Chairman Doug Miller stated, “It appears that the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 may not have been the crushing victory for free-market capitalism that it seemed at the time—particularly after the events of the last 12 months.”

This is in reference to the economic crisis that is ruining entire economies and destroying living standards the world over.

It was under these circumstances that leaders of the major powers gathered in Berlin on November 9 for a “Festival of Freedom” to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall. But the efforts to revive popular enthusiasm for the overthrows of the Stalinist regimes were marred by the fact that all over the world, the supposedly capitalist victor is itself in profound crisis.

At the centre of this global capitalist breakdown is the United States. Having declared itself triumphant following the overthrows in the USSR and Eastern Europe, the US is today economically bankrupt.

In reality, as Leon Trotsky had warned, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its satellite states was the tragic and inevitable consequence of the reactionary role played by the Stalinist bureaucracy and its policy of building “socialism in one country.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* stated on November 9, “The contradictions between world economy and nation state—between the global character of production that has welded together millions of workers all over the globe in one socially unified process of production, and the division of the world into rival nation states—broke the back of the Stalinist regimes two decades ago. These contradictions, however, also lie behind the growing conflicts between imperialist powers, the escalating wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the unceasing attacks on the social gains of the working class and the arrogance and greed of the financial elite.”

Only last month, United Nations aid agencies reported that more than 1 billion people will have experienced undernourishment by the end of this year. An additional 100 million people have joined the ranks of the underfed—which now constitute one sixth of the global population—as a direct result of the global economic recession. Much of the rise is in the poorest regions of the world, such as Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and the Middle East.

Also in October, the World Bank reported on the devastating decline in living standards that has occurred in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Predicting a 5.6 percent fall in economic growth for “emerging Europe and Central Asia” this year, it reported that unemployment now stands at 11.4 million in the region. One third of the population in the region lives in poverty.

In western Europe, the backdrop for capitalist triumphalism, the situation is no better. The European Union has warned that the public deficit amongst its member states could rise to 100 percent of gross domestic product by 2014 due to the global crisis. Urging “fiscal discipline,” it stated that five countries were particularly at risk of potential bankruptcy. This includes the UK, the world’s sixth largest economy and the third largest in Europe. Only last week, the British government announced the world’s biggest bailout for a single bank, the Royal Bank of Scotland, taking the total of public funds handed over to the banks in aid and stimulus packages to some £1 trillion.

In the US itself, the election of Barack Obama has seen no let-up in the right-wing, big business policies of its Bush predecessor. Some \$700 billion has been given to the banks, with an additional \$23.7 trillion made available in loans, subsidies and other guarantees to the financial parasites on Wall Street. The price of this subvention to the super-rich is being extracted from the American working class, as seen in the forced bankruptcy and wage cutting in the auto industry, and the continuing wars of aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan and increasingly Pakistan.

The BBC poll underscores that the realities of daily life faced by workers across the globe are making their impact on social consciousness. Whatever the facile pronouncements of the powers-that-be, capitalism is being discredited by its own actions.

At the same time, the leftward sentiment identified in the BBC poll has no outlet within official political channels. Significantly, the poll received barely any coverage in the mainstream media.

It should be noted that the poll results reflect the start of a process that portends even greater political shocks and upheavals. In the coming period, the turn to an alternative to the capitalist system—the socialist reorganisation of society so as to satisfy social needs, not private profit—will become a conscious political orientation among masses of people.



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