

**It's very important that people get active**  
**Interview with SUSAN GEORGE**

1 **What are the characteristics**  
2 **of a capitalist economy?**

3 A capitalist economy is one in which money  
4 comes first. You must get a certain percentage on  
5 what you invest and some people are able to de-  
6 mand more and more for having invested in a cor-  
7 poration. But the main characteristic of it—as Karl  
8 Marx explained in the 19th century—is that the  
9 corporations make their profits. How can a compa-  
10 ny make profits? It can make money of its workers  
11 by paying them less. In financial terms capitalism  
12 is about getting lots of interest back on your cap-  
13 ital investments, your money investments. But in  
14 human terms and social terms it's about exploiting  
15 labour. So the union movement is extremely im-  
16 portant to fight back against this system.

17 **In which way does capitalism**  
18 **influence our social lives?**

19 I think one's social activity depends a lot on  
20 work. When I was younger it was easy in the Unit-  
21 ed States and in countries like France to live. A  
22 family could live on one salary. This is much less  
23 true today and women have to take a lot of the  
24 burden. Husbands do now sometimes help with  
25 the children, but it's the women with school-age  
26 and small children, who have to take on a long,  
27 long day in order to supplement the family income,  
28 because one salary isn't enough. And capitalism  
29 also separates social classes enormously. We're in  
30 a period in which the rich are getting richer, the  
31 poor are getting poorer and the middle class is be-  
32 ing left behind. I would say in the US in particular  
33 but also in many European countries, it's almost as  
34 if there were two worlds that never touch: The one  
35 of ordinary people and the one of the elites, which  
36 has different habits, lifestyles and thought patterns.  
37 And the elites think all this is perfectly normal.  
38 The neoliberal belief system is, that if you don't  
39 succeed, if you don't have the money you need, it's  
40 your own fault: »You didn't try hard enough, you  
41 didn't work hard enough, so don't come to me  
42 and ask me to pay more taxes, so that you can have  
43 an easier life. I don't owe you anything.« That is  
44 the mentality, more and more. Unless we can get  
45 rid of neoliberalism, and there are some good reac-  
46 tions, we are going to suffer a lot. Ordinary people  
47 will suffer a great deal and they should know that.

48 **In which direction would you say is capitalism**  
49 **currently developing. What do you expect**  
50 **in terms of regulation and social security?**

51 I really can't answer that, because it depends  
52 on the politics. A lot depends on the European  
53 Union and the Europeans. The EU seems deter-  
54 mined to give the largest corporations—but not  
55 small businesses—all of the privileges that it can.

56 The corporations are trying to reduce regulation,  
57 they say it's a cost but they never say it's a benefit  
58 for other people, which it is. We need regulation,  
59 we need it for our food so that we don't have to eat  
60 poison, we need it for our land so that we don't  
61 have everything grown with pesticides and full of  
62 chemicals, we need it for our health and our so-  
63 cial lives so that we have proper health care, good  
64 schools and that we have free universities, so that  
65 people can go as far in their studies as they can. To  
66 preserve and to improve all this, it's very important  
67 that people get involved, that people get active.

68 And we haven't talked about climate change at  
69 all, but I think that's a part of it. Because as cli-  
70 mate change increases, if we don't invest massive-  
71 ly—state investments and also corporate invest-  
72 ments—in renewable energy, we're done for. We  
73 have to deal with climate change and we can only  
74 do that if we get a hold on the taxes and we close  
75 down the tax havens and say: »Give us back the  
76 money.« There's at least 21 trillion dollars in tax  
77 havens. That's enough to invest in changing the  
78 whole energy system very quickly. But we have  
79 to get the money to do it, because otherwise our  
80 governments say: »Well, we'd love to do it, you're  
81 absolutely right, but we don't have the money.«  
82 But they do, they just don't go after it where it is.  
83 Tax havens only serve the richest individuals and  
84 the corporations that don't pay their fair share.

85 **Would you say capitalism is**  
86 **coming to an end and why?**

87 No, I'm afraid that is wishful thinking; we have  
88 a long way ahead. Only ten percent of our econo-  
89 mies are social enterprises and cooperatives. And  
90 I think a capitalist system, the kind that we had in  
91 the United States under the »New Deal« of Pres-  
92 ident Roosevelt or in many European countries  
93 since the end of World War II, with a great deal of  
94 social protection isn't so bad. We can give people  
95 what they need and what they want, not with lux-  
96 ury but with adequacy. But all this is being disman-  
97 tled under neoliberalism. We're going backward.

98 **Could you summarize in a few sentences what a**  
99 **better world or a better system would look like?**

100 No I can't, because I think it's a question of what  
101 we invent. And what people decide is what they  
102 want. I think it would be a world in which many  
103 more things were shared than are now shared. It  
104 would be a world in which energy was absolutely  
105 cheap and plentiful. Where innovation would be  
106 welcome, where people could use their ideas to  
107 invent social things, but also material things, and  
108 control technology. It would be a world in which  
109 we solve the climate change issue. ■

## Going into debt for things which should be social rights

### Interview with JAYATI GHOSH

**How would you define capitalism and what are the characteristics of this particular system?**

Capitalism is a system that results in extreme exploitation and inequality. It is a rapacious system, but not necessarily because the people running it are bloody-minded. It is part of the nature of the system. In other words, the purpose of capital is to make profits and only those who make profits will survive, the rest will fall by the wayside. It therefore means that success in capitalism necessarily implies the destruction of your competitors and exploitation. Because that is how you make the profits. It is the objective working of that system that gives you the inequality and the exploitation.

**How does capitalism affect the people and the way people work?**

Of course, capitalism affects how you work, that is fundamental. Today, globalized finance capitalism creates much more insecurity in the world. It creates much more of the older kind of piece-rate work rather than time-rate work. So you can't even demand proper wages for time, because everyone, even in the service sector, is doing piece-jobs. And now increasingly it is working in a very complex way, where people are told that they are their own employers. There is no employer, so you are exploiting yourself. Your worker protection, your safety at work, your minimum wages, these are all your problems, because you are your own employer.

**In what way does capitalism influence our social life beyond the pure economic realm?**

There are different ways. Let us first talk about capitalism and then about financial capitalism. First of all, Capitalism itself encourages you to commodify everything. Everything becomes an object of exchange and that exchange itself can evolve into profit. So, whether we are talking about something that is produced or we are talking about water or we are talking about clean air or we are talking about education or we are talking about pleasure—everything is an object of exchange. And that creates a society that is looking at everything in terms of these exchanges, which in turn reduces all notions of solidarity, of social cohesion, of support, mutual support, and of the things which have constituted humanity. This is so atomizing, it destroys the base of solidarity.

**And what is specific to present-day financial capitalism?**

Financial capitalism is even more complex, because everything becomes object of an exchange that is mediated by finance. One feature of global

capitalism in the last twenty or thirty years is the declining wage share of income. But how does consumption keep going up then? By borrowing—it encourages people to borrow, because that is how you keep effective demand going. You borrow to buy houses, you borrow for your basic consumption, for luxury consumption, for education, for health purposes. You have to borrow for everything and therefore you worry about the credit and debt markets. A second feature is, since they have reduced social protection, that everybody is invested in savings and so they become rentiers. The same workers, who are borrowing are also trying to save for their old age or for their children or for some calamity in their house. Consequently, they care about the value of those savings. Increasingly you find that everything is being financialized. People are going into debt for the most straightforward and obvious things, which should be part of their social and economic rights.

**In which direction, would you say is capitalism, currently developing and what would capitalism look like in ten or twenty years?**

I think we are in one of those watershed periods. It is certainly not the final crisis of capitalism, but we are in a period, where the system is coming under attack from left and right, in the US, in the UK, in Europe, in India. How it changes, in which direction it changes to, in just and democratic ways, or whether it changes at all? I think a lot of that depends on the politics.

**What kind of system could be evolving after a capitalistic one?**

I believe in socialism. In Socialism very broadly defined, which is to say that it is a system that provides equal opportunities to everyone, regardless of their birth. Whether you are born as a girl in a tribal part in rural India or you are born in a very educated household in Germany as a man—it does not matter. Now, what is the form that this socialism takes? I think we learned a lot of things from the experience of actually existing socialism. We learned that very centralized top-down systems are not ideal. We learned that we have to recognize different forms of inequality and discrimination like gender, like community, like religion, like caste in India—that class is not the only form of inequality or discrimination. And we learned that the motivation for human activity has to go beyond one which is solely striving for income growth. I think the new systems will have to take this into account. ■

## The social structure we place around the technology Interview with PAUL MASON

### How would you define capitalism?

Capitalism to me is a system round about 500 years old, where the market regulates the relationships between human beings. Before that we had feudalism in Europe, where obligation regulated relationships between human beings. And when you get the rise of the scientific revolution alongside the globalization of commerce, when we invented ships that could cross big seas, you get the start of a market-driven economy.

There is one big change that happens within capitalism. 200 years ago it became industrial in the sense that we started to build machines and put them in factories and divide labor in a very efficient way. Industrialization is characterized by technological progress; it can only work through relentless technological progress. This is a great system, because it—and only it so far—allowed productivity to take off in a 45-degree angle and also population. Until industrialization the number of people expands, as wealth expands. What happens in 1820 is that the earth can suddenly support many, many more human beings, than it could before.

### How does capitalism affect the way people work?

We think it's natural now to work for wages but in many societies wages were not the way that people earned their keep. In slavery your master fed you. In feudalism you swapped part of your crop. Capitalism, especially in its industrial phase, brings with it wage labor. So we work for money and we work to a rhythm and the length of time decided by our employer. What happened, especially in the early period, was that human beings worked the longest hours they've ever worked, they worked in the most destructive conditions, and people died younger, because the factory system was probably the most brutal imposed new form of economics ever. 200 years on we in the West reached the benefits, but if you were to go in a factory in Bangladesh and if you were to go in a factory in Indonesia you would see conditions similar to the conditions your great, great, great grandparents lived in in the early 19th century.

### In which direction would you say is capitalism currently developing?

#### What will it look like in ten or twenty years?

I think that we are developing quite rapidly to a point, where we could leave capitalism behind. All forms of hierarchical economics, all forms of pow-

er structure are based on scarcity. That is, there are only so many cars to go around and therefore a market exists to distribute them. Information technology is bringing and could bring even more dramatically abundance. That's the opposite of scarcity. Economists don't know how to even think about abundance. To classical economics something that is abundant is not an economic thing. So, air is abundant, there is no economy of air. For me, information technology is a critical new kind of technology, which makes expensive things cheap and cheap things free. No other technology has done this on that scale and that's why I think we stand on the brink of a quite big transformation in which much less work is being done on the planet and some of that work is not being done in the market at all. It will not be done for wages, but as a contribution to society.

### What kind of system could be evolving after capitalism? What could it look like?

We're going to have autonomous cars within 20 or 30 years. When the technology-enterprises in Silicon Valley think about how autonomous cars are going to work, they think: Maybe the road will charge the car per mile—one cent, per mile. Or when the car wants to go in the fast lane, it will pay some money. Or it will negotiate its way through a traffic jam. In other words, what they are imagining is a scarcity of both, cars and road space. But I imagine a future in which for all the miles of human journey which we can imagine, we have enough cars and enough roads and therefore society provides access to an autonomous car as a public good, the same as it supplies water today. You pay a standard flat charge quite low and you just get in the car when it comes. These are two very different views on the same technology. The argument is not about technology, it's about which social structure we place around the technology. There is more than one social structure we can use for example to automate the transport of a city. We can either do in an atomized way, where each vehicle negotiates with the other and therefore a price is possible. Or we do it in a planned way, in which is a lot of autonomy of decision-making. Do I take my car or my bicycle, or a tram, or a bus, or an underground train? But in the end, the whole system works together from a centralized brain and the money you pay is like a tax rather than a price. ■