

A Rouge Forum Broadside

The Good News: The US Rulers' Military and Economic Sky is Falling

The Bad News: The Universe of Capital is Not

"Capital investment is an act of deep faith..." G. W. Bush (7-7-02)

The Lingering Lure of Irrationalism : The War of Ideas

(Part One of a Series)

George Bush was shocked, simply shocked. Arthur Anderson lied. Worldcom lied. Enron lied. Corporate scandals pile up, the stock market rushes down. At the same time, the Catholic Church stands exposed as a haven for rapists and thieves, robbing the poor box to pay hush money to victims while it, so reluctantly, supports the endless Oil War.

In each instance, the media treats the dual crises as flukes, aberrations within otherwise decent well-meaning systems still deserving of popular support--which will result in popular comfort. No.

The US economy, which is not *our* economy but the property of a ruling class that is ever more naked and ruthless, and the techno-based military force that allowed the rich to enjoy an era of unprecedented greed and debauchery, are both in deep crises. The executive committee of the rich, the government, has provoked what they say is a perpetual war on the world, not for justice but for oil, while their economy collapses from the weight of its own pillars: greed, fear, and opportunism.

The world capitalist economy is a shambles, and failing fast. The Nasdaq virtually disappeared. The Dow is down 3000, to about 8,000, and plunges. Predictions about the Dow reaching 35,000 in the land of bottomless profiteering are drowned in speculation about the date of the beginning of the depression. The collapsing value of the dollar is discouraging foreign investors who helped fuel the myth of the endless party. Big fish, as always, are eating little fish, but all the fishes are dying--and so is the sea.

In a world divided by social class inequality, what makes the notion of *our* economy, *our* nation, *our* religion, etc., possible is irrationalism, the decision to stop thinking, to choose to believe that some questions, unresolved problems, can only be answered by mysticism, usually embodied by someone who seeks pay or privilege for the revelation. Mysticism, breaking the chain of evidence, dispensing with tests for truth in favor of a leap of faith, becomes profitable—and virtuous.

The impact of irrationalism, which is commonly set up with promises of greater personal freedom, here or in heaven, and more autonomy, greater insight, is in fact to tie people even more to the ruling class and to make them more subservient to it—even though most working people and the elites have only opposition in common. Virtue then becomes the fear of knowledge, and a fetter, chaining people of opposing interests, classes, in the same cells, with only the Masters holding the keys.

Racism is irrational. Sexism is irrational. Nationalism is irrational. The fear of sexuality is irrational, as is the fear of freedom and friendly connections between people. Capitalism, serving a few at the expense of many, that is, structural inequality, is irrational. People create gods; gods do not create people. Wealth does not create labor. Labor creates wealth. Religion is irrational—a dangerous turn to faith that has a long history of consequences: death, parallel to capitals' infinite wars. In each instance, the defense of nonsense requires violence: religious war and imperialist war.

There is nothing consistent with the ideas that defend irrationalism, but there are consistent practical tendencies. Irrationalism in defense of capitalism consistently seeks to divide people, yet at the same time to claim to false forms of unity, as in the cases of racism and nationalism. Both are vital life-lines of profits. Irrationalism in defense of religion proclaims one-world, after death, but a sectarian world in life—convert or die. War, for oil, water, or the cheap labor of humans—is quite legal.

Capitalist and religious irrationalism offer no logic but the logic of opportunism. For example, in the midst of recent revelations involving the entire Catholic hierarchy in promoting, then covering-up, a centuries' old practice, child rape by priests, church officials went to court demanding protection from grand juries under the constitution, the separation of church and state. At the same time, the priesthood was in court demanding state funds for school vouchers.

Capitalism in its higher stages reaches a point where the sole purpose of capital is to produce more capital, finance capital, rather than to produce things that are useful to people. For example, the chief of what was once US Steel Corporation won wage concessions from his workers, “in order to save the company and our nation's steel industry.” The United Steel Workers Union made concessions, 25 % pay-cuts (without telling the workers). With the concession money in hand, the chief of US Steel then bought Hublein Corporation, a Canadian liquor company. Confronted with the deception by reporters, the boss said, “Look, I am not in business to make steel. I am in business to make money.”

This distancing of profiteering from production is what caused the pretense of a boom in the 1990's. The NASDAQ, the technology stock exchange, boomed with nearly nothing of value behind it at all. Mergers substituted for production. Only Microsoft and a few other techno-agencies actually produced profits. The remainder of the NASDAQ was simply a ponzi scheme, borrowing heaped on borrowing, that eventually collapsed. Each company had its priests, its auditors and toadies in the press, lying about its true state.

At the same time, basic industry in the US nearly vanished. The steel industry, key to war production, sank against foreign competition. Only huge agri-businesses actually continued to produce a product successfully inside the US, achieved by driving people off their land, a worldwide stratagem that supplies capital with jobless workers in huge cities, driving down the wages of the employed.

The media is focused, on the one hand, on what they seem to think are aberrations in the process of capital, and in the church. But rapist priests, cheating accountants, lying bosses, and capital's wars are not flukes. They are the logical working out of irrational systems that necessarily lead to where they are today, deep social and spiritual crises. What has happened to the economy is not just the auditors' lies, which are themselves built into capital's greed, but the fact that capital necessarily drives down wages to the point where people cannot buy what they produce, a crisis of unemployment and over-production that is now international. The big picture is that capital cannot work. So, capital is divorced from production, indeed turns back on production and destroys it in war, while the mystics place themselves between the people and god, really the people and a better world on earth. But capital thrives on crises, just as priests thrive on people who do not believe they can comprehend and change the world.

This refusal to connect capitalism with financial collapse and war, which is written on every page of capital's history, and the church with child abuse, then leads to a variety of transubstantiations: one day Ghodoffy and Libya are the Devil and the Evil Empire, the next day it's Saddam and Iraq. Rapist priests come and go, but the Pope and the Church persist. Flags wave over all.

Just as there is no way to resolve religious differences, so is there no way to restrain the incessant demands of the capitalist system: high-profits, cheaper labor and raw materials, markets to sell (always at an advantage). War and fascism are the necessary outcomes of capital's requirements. Every significant human advance, in knowledge or technology or reproduction, has come despite religious beliefs. Civilization progresses by rejecting irrationalism of all forms, but especially religious irrationalism. The test of any society is how it treats its majority: the workers. Capital can never pass this test. In addressing any reform, we must connect that reform to the social whole, capital, and discover ways to go beyond it.

As long as we are ensnared by the irrationalism of capital and religion, which do offer us both the organization (an interconnected world with sufficient technology so all could live fairly well) and values (do unto others) which can assist us in creating a more just world.

Capitalism will not be overcome by ideas alone. But every effort to go beyond capital so far has been poisoned from within, by nationalism, elitism, racism, sexism, and more. If we are to find ways to a better world, and we must, we will need to understand, and surpass, capital's big lie: Irrationalism.

A Rouge Forum Broadside