

Good morning! Thank you for joining me today. I have had a tortuous path with Capitalism. In college, in the late 60's, we took for granted CAPITALISM would supply us with better life than previous generations. After college, I took a job with a Fortune 500 company. But I left after a decade, disillusioned with corporate life, but stayed with CAPITALISM by founding a small business which I was able to pass on to employees. While still managing my business, I transitioned to public service in Local Government serving the civil society and not corporations. While with Local Government, I founded the Greater Tompkins County Municipal Health Insurance Consortium, a health insurance company providing health insurance to municipal employees. We competed with and took customers from Excellus. And during this time, Rita and I were building a home on a farm where we grew our food and reduced our carbon footprint. My relationship or divorce from CAPITALISM has been evolving over the years.

When we hear the word capitalism, our thoughts go immediately to an economic system of wage labor, production, markets for exchange, and finance whose overarching goals are growth and profit. Yet behind these activities stands a foundation of necessary supports and enabling conditions: families and communities that produce workers, nature, territorial states, civil societies, and multiple forms of unwaged and expropriated labor.

I want to suggest for your thinking an expanded view of capitalism. Capitalism is much more than an economic model. CAPITALISM can only operate within an institutionalized societal order that authorizes wealth created by the collective action of society to be controlled by investors and owners. This societal structure is a two-class system: the owners and the rest of us. This capitalistic societal order is so pervasive in our lives that Mark Fisher, renowned capitalism critic, said "It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism".

I suggest for your thinking that Capitalism's foundation requires four non-economic, indispensable pillars to operate and attain its goals of profit and growth. They are: societal reproduction of its workforce; nature; expropriated resources; and public power. CAPITALISM feeds on these free or low-cost inputs. And does so while taking no responsibility to replenish or repair any of them. These costs, to replenish and repair, are then pushed down to civil society to bear. In no particular order, I'd like to describe these four pillars.

Workers, birthed and cared for by communities, are necessary for Capitalism. The Care work for producing workers are the tasks like care giving, community building, social cooperation, schooling, and child rearing - tasks that have been mostly done by women. But CAPITALISM separates production from care work. This differentiation allows CAPITALISM to devalue care work and with that it institutionalizes gender domination. CAPITALISM perceives care work as not having value to its bottom line. By neglecting any role in the provision of care work, it exploits the working class.

Our Society has come to accept this separation because we accept a two-class system where owners decide and workers work.

Not only does CAPITALISM exploits the care givers but production workers as well. Although unionization was at a high point after the Great Depression when CAPITALISM was brought to its knees and agreed to allow the political response of state-managed Capitalism, in truth, this response was to save CAPITALISM from self-destabilization and revolution. Reeling from this implosion, CAPITALISM allowed public power to create social welfare to support society's care work. So Capitalists agreed to pay taxes for public

investment in care systems, public infrastructure (which created jobs), and Social Security. In fact, back in the 50s and 60s, employers competed for workers through generous pension plans.

When workers moved off the farm to work in factories, they gave up access to basic subsistence resources. Although free to choose where and if to work. Although free to move between employers, the working class needed to work to purchase resources like food, clothing, shelter, transportation, healthcare, etc. They needed jobs. But with the development of machines that could do many of labor's tasks, and the offshoring of both blue-collar and white-collar jobs, and with the lead of President Reagan's union busting of airport controllers, unionized jobs declined. And with all that so went the protection unions provided against CAPITALISM's exploitation of its workers and their families.

Precarious service sector jobs have replaced unionized industrial labor, resulting in wage rates insufficient for cost of care work. Capitalism's impact on our social system is sapping energies needed to tend to the care work of families, maintaining health, and sustaining communities. This exploited condition, previously reserved for racial minorities and the poor, is shrinking the middle class. As tax breaks are given to the owner class, tax revenues decline. With less tax revenue, CAPITALISM demands elected officials impose austerity on the welfare state which compounds fiscal pressure from low wages. CAPITALISM says this is okay because the markets will in time correct any imbalance. But it never does. Think of Reagan's trickle-down nonsense. In truth the lower class just gets accustomed to having less and working harder for it.

CAPITALISM also requires the pillar of earth and nature as its source of minerals, materials, energy, and food stuffs to power bodies, water, air, and tillable land. As in the case of care work, CAPITALISM thinks itself separate from nature.

Capitalism treats nature like a faucet that gives an endless treasure trove of materials and at the same time as a sink where waste is flushed down at no cost. But CAPITALISM takes no responsibility to replenish or conserve what comes from the faucet or repair its wastes impact downstream. Continual drawing from the tap and dumping down the drain is destroying the earth. CAPITALISM'S accelerating pace of resource consumption to grow their markets and expanding volume of waste is overwhelming the earth's ability to self-repair which we see in extreme weather, mass extinctions, and global warming, to name a few. And in the case of minerals and fossil fuels, rather than conserving, CAPITALISM doubles down on expropriation performing even more invasive extraction techniques like undersea mining.

Yet our political system licenses capitalists to extract raw materials, generate energy, determine land use, engineer food systems, and dispose of waste. This effectively cedes the lion share of control over air, water, soil, forest, oceans, and climate to the owner class. CAPITALISM society thus vests to a class with strong motivation to trash nature the power to manage our relation to it. The day of reckoning for not repairing the ecosystems appears to be fast approaching. To be clear, what threatens to incinerate our planet is not humanity but rather capitalism.

Capitalism also depends on the ability to expropriate inputs for production by the forceable seizure of minerals, materials, energy, and labor through imperialism, conquest, and oppression of communities of black, indigenous and people of color. Expropriation also occurs by siting polluting industries in what it considers low value areas like wetlands, deserts, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) neighborhoods. And CAPITALISM is not afraid to expropriate wealth from rural America. Many may

remember Compulsory Integration was an expropriating tool used right here in upstate New York by fossil fuel conglomerates to take gas rights from unwilling landowners.

But expropriation mostly occurs from “others,” devalued peoples who look different with ancestry mostly from the global south. Naming folks as “others” is the basis of racism. These “others” - slaves, colonized subjects, conquered natives, debt peons, immigrants, illegal aliens, and convicted felons - are denied political protection. These people have no rights, thereby unable to participate in a process to set limits and invoke protections. CAPITALISM society doesn't strongly object because these expropriated resources supply us with cheap food, energy, materials, and cheap labor for assembling textiles and electronics. Expropriation allows CAPITALISM to pay little or nothing and take no responsibility to replenish, leaving those costs to the impacted communities.

Capitalism's ability to cannibalize nature, expropriate wealth from others, and exploit its workers requires a fourth pillar: public power. Public power includes government, repressive forces, and physical infrastructure. Public power creates currency and structures for exchange. All of these are necessary for CAPITALISM to operate with freedom for its profit and growth.

Public Power guarantees private property rights, enforces contracts, adjudicates disputes, suppresses rebellions, maintains civil order, manages dissent, undertakes efforts to forestall or manage crises, codifies and enforces class and racial status, and maintains a military to protect CAPITALISM's interests everywhere, ensuring its ability to expropriate labor, materials, and energy.

Although requiring public power, capitalism resents the taxes public power imposes on it. Capitalism, whose reason to be is profit, strives to evade taxes, weaken regulations, privatize public goods and services, and offshore their operations. Those of us not in the Owner class see the arc of Public Power always bends to serve Capitalism. CAPITALISM have used their amassed wealth to buy the control levers of Public Power. CAPITALISM then tells Public Power to abdicate economic decisions to the invisible hand of the markets. But the markets hands are not invisible. It is really the hands of large corporations and monopolies who control the marketplace. This arrangement deprives us of the ability to decide collectively what best serves our societal order.

The current US Supreme Court was put into power by capitalists. With their oversized political campaign donations, the owner class has delivered a broken legislative branch. So the Supreme Court is the only federal agency able to set policy. And they are moving at a rapid pace to codify into law political structures to further strengthen CAPITALISM's hold and control by: expanding CAPITALISM power with Citizens United; exploiting women with Dobbs; eviscerating EPA authority; and rescinding portions of the Voting Rights law - to name a few. Citizens United has produced one political party that overtly does the bidding of CAPITALISM and enough members of the other political party are paid off to allow Capitalism's will to be done. And States participate in a race to the bottom by lowering corporate taxes, further depleting state coffers and justifying austerity to divest from social welfare. Court decisions are eviscerating hard won labor rights, setting up once protected workers for violation. And these lower paid workers have little choice but to buy cheap stuff made elsewhere.

Further, Policy makers, corporate media, and corporate advertising have participated in creating a culture of materialism and consumerism, resulting in a reinvention of the household. It is no longer a place for societal reproduction. Rather, households now are a private space for domestic consumption of

mass-produced mostly unnecessary gadgets, not for basic needs. Racing headlong into consumption opens up a role for Financial Capitalism.

Financial capitalism (financing debt) is a huge and expanding source of wealth transfer to the ruling class. Financial CAPITALISM creates a structure where banks and lenders set the terms and use techniques like predatory loans and debt foreclosure. It is increasingly through debt that CAPITALISM controls labor, disciplines states, transfer wealth to the ruling class by extracting value from households, families, communities, and nature. Financial Capitalists have seized control of public policy decisions. We are now in an era of governance without government.

I have only touched on a description of the world where CAPITALISM is quite frankly thriving. It is the same world we live in and it feels like we are drowning. The UU principles Jesse read are the road map our religious faith endorses for our relationship with other humans, planet Earth and fellow Earth travelers. These principles speak to justice, equity, and compassion- the antithesis of exploitation – and acknowledge the worth and dignity of all persons, and counter to the techniques used for expropriation, promote the right to democratic process, and the honoring of the interconnected web of life.

I have described how the institutionalized societal order, designed by and for Capitalism, works in direct opposition to our UU principles. The balance of power has shifted too far toward the owner class. We see that we are in a feverish race to annihilation- which nobody wants, and nobody can stop. I can't be more blunt in describing how serious this is. How do we turn this around? You may have been hoping I would suggest an answer. Sorry, I can't. But I do believe when we acknowledge the oppression of the Capitalist system, we can then discover answers together. Despite our efforts in fighting for social justice, democracy, and our environment, both individually and as a society, we are losing ground. I believe that's because our responses are siloed into one issue and, in fact, compete with each other. Worthy causes compete for our money and time. I believe all these separate issues are only one issue which can only be addressed in the context of the entire institutional framework and the structural dynamics of a CAPITALISM society. To be effective in addressing any crises caused by CAPITALISM, our strategic actions must first recognize connectedness and link with all these ethno-racial-equity-environmental concerns. Solutions will only occur when we recognize the cause for each is the same for all. It is today's established societal order. Don Barber 8/13/22.