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From: nick herbert
The good side of Y2K

Dear Valued Employee:

Our records indicate that you have not used any vacation time for the past 100 year(s). As I'm sure you are aware, employees are granted 3 weeks of paid leave per year or pay in lieu of time off. One additional week is granted for every 5 years of service. Please either take 9,400 days off work, or notify our office and your next pay check will reflect payment of $8,277,432.22, which will include all pay and interest for the past 1,200 months.
Sociologists have long maintained that Capitalism is bad for society's health. In fact, Capitalism now threatens humanity's very existence—in more ways than one!

A case in point is the "millennium bug" or Y2K computer problem. For several issues we have presented evidence to show that this problem is indeed real and has the potential to disrupt government, industry and commerce throughout the industrialized world—with all that this implies. Evidence continues to mount not only of the immensity of the problem but, also, of the improbability of Capitalism being able to fix it in time.

What caused this problem in the first place and why has it been allowed to reach such critical—perhaps socially-terminal—proportions? Back when computers (mainframes) were beginning to make significant inroads into social affairs (around the early '60s) memory space was at a premium. In order to save space and expense for their customers or employers, programmers began using only 2 digits for year dates—61 for 1961 and so on. This worked/works fine—until we reach the year 2000 which will apparently read 00 and be taken for 1900 by computers thus programmed. In turn will apparently cause all kinds of problems, particularly in date-sensitive applications. This seemingly insignificant decision then will apparently have catastrophic consequences in the year 2000, and even before, unless these programs are rewritten to make them year 2000 compliant. As we have previously noted, this is a time-consuming and very expensive task and both factors increasingly militate against a capitalist solution.

Now, the obvious question—the question that literally leaps out at us here is: "Didn't these programmers know the possible consequences of their actions and, if so, why did they continue to pursue such a course?" This was essentially the question asked of Ontario computer consultant, Peter De Jager, during a CBC radio interview on the Y2K problem Nov. 26, 1997. Thus:

Moderator: "Why, in the beginning of the computer era, didn't somebody sit down and say: 'Wait a minute! If the thing can only read 19 before two zeros, we might have a problem!'"
De Jager: "Thousands of programmers pointed that out to management...Myself and hundreds of thousands of other programmers knew this. We said 'This will not work in the year 2000.' We said this in the 1960s. And management's response [was]: 'You're worrying about a problem that isn't going to affect us for 40 years? Go away!'"

De Jager later added: "Now I'm not placing the blame entirely on management. We, as professionals, should have stood our ground and said: 'No! If we're going to write systems, we're going to write them properly so that they'll work into the future.' To our defence, no one thought that when we wrote programs in the 1960s or 1970s that those programs would still be around 30 years in the future."

While "standing their ground" was no doubt what these programmers should have done, the fact that they didn't is not surprising. Workers, even those who don't consider themselves in that light, soon learn what to expect when they buck their capitalist employer, or his "managers," especially on matters that bear directly on said Capitalist's profit margins. This truth was eloquently expressed in an August 7 letter to The Toronto Star, by Brian W. Kirby, as follows:

"Re Combatting the millennium bug (Your Business, July 18). In the tiny window, What's the millennium bug, you state, 'What caused it?' Shortsighted computer programmers in the 1960s and '70s are the cause of all the angst. To save space on their big, bulky, memory-poor computers, they dropped the 19 from number sequences denoting years...

"If you looked at the history of the computer industry, you would very soon realize that way back then there were generally only mainframe computers and they may have been big and bulky but, as to memory, one megabyte of memory cost at that time and place in history $10,000 American.

"Memory was very, very, very expensive. Thus, all programmers were forced into writing very tight code and the faster it ran on the system using the minimal level of resources the better.
Wilde conside

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et Dallas

squirrel

Pet squirrel

Beaver

"Any programmer who decided to, shall we say, 'capture the 2000 vision' and calmly informed his boss or bosses back in the '60s and '70s that he was going to use four-digit year dates when all others were using two-digit year dates, and when one meg of memory would cost the company $10,000 U.S., would rapidly discover the joys of being what in those days was correctly called fired. He would have lost his job quickly.

"If anyone is to blame, may I suggest that it be the shortsightedness and greed, if not incompetence, of the American business elite.

"The millennium bug may end up costing billions of dollars to fix and demand major efforts and commitments from businesses around the globe, but it is totally wrong to blame it on the programmers back then who, at the orders of their business leaders, tried their very best to achieve efficient coding at a time when memory inside computers was so very costly."

BRIAN W. KIRBY

Toronto.

So much for the sly attempt (pretty much the norm in the capitalist media) to foist the blame for this fiasco onto "the programmers" or "the Managers"—anyone or anything but the capitalist system! Some have even gone so far as to blame us all for the problem. "We" placed too much faith in science and technology and now "we" may have to pay for our indiscretion. As if the working class, the great majority, was ever asked if we should sell our souls to the computer.

No! The culprit here is Capitalism! Capitalism, with its private ownership of the industrial means of life and production for sale and profit, thrives on the wage system of exploitation, inevitably rides roughshod over any social considerations that pose a danger to that profit. The fierce competitive struggle that Capitalism engenders drives each capitalist corporation, on pain of extinction, to continually find ways to 'cheapen its commodities, thus gain the competitive edge on its rivals'. It was in the heat of this competitive struggle that the 'millennium bug' was spawned—the result of an incredibly shortsighted and profit-motivated decision that has now exposed society to the possibility of a complete functional breakdown.

When asked by the CBC moderator: "Do we have enough time to fix stuff, however we do it?" De Jager replied: "I remain optimistic. It's becoming more and more difficult to remain optimistic due to the denial that's out there. There's still a tremendous amount of denial. We have the tools, we have the people, we have the intelligence and we have the skill necessary to fix this. But we seem to lack management will. We seem to lack the will to act and to treat this problem with the respect it deserves. If we did then we have time to fix this."

De Jager’s guarded optimism can perhaps be explained by the fact that, as a computer consultant whose business it is to advise companies on the Y2K problem, he could hardly be expected to publicly take too pessimistic a view. However, while some action has been taken by businesses and governments in the interim, evidence to date tends to belie such optimism. For example, an article by Robert Cribb in The Toronto Star of July 7 notes that:

"Canadian companies are finally preparing themselves for the impending millennium computer glitch—but it could be too late for many, says a federal task force report.

"The national supply chain remains vulnerable," Jean Monty, chair of Task Force Year 2000, said yesterday as the federal government-appointed group...issued its final report on Canadian industry's preparedness for the so-called 'millennium bug.'

"With only 18 months left before Year 2000, it is critical that firms—particularly those who started late—catch up. In many cases, it could already be too late."

"A Statistics Canada study also released yesterday indicates two-thirds of companies have taken steps to prepare themselves for the Year 2000 computer problem...That 66 per cent figure is up from 45 per cent in October when a similar survey was taken...."

"While large businesses such as banks, telecommunication companies and air carriers have co-operated in a formal way in their own sectors to address the Year 2000 problem, we have found that this is not the case, unfortunately, for providers of other essential services such as electrical power, oil and gas, food and water supplies.'
"Despite heightened awareness around the problem across all industries, there is still evidence of private sector foot-dragging in the StatsCan numbers. Most striking is the fact 30 per cent of company respondents had not taken any action on the problem as of May....

"Joe Boivin, a Y2K consultant in Ottawa and manager of a Y2K Web site (www.glob-almf.org), said the 2000 glitch will trigger a flood of bankruptcies among companies that ignore the dangers.

"Very few organizations have grasped the extent of the problem," he said. "All the evidence we have says we're losing this race. The sooner we recognize that and put better plans in place, the better chance we have."

While the above evidence deals with the Canadian situation, similar evidence abounds to indicate that the U.S., Europe and Asia are also way behind in their Y2K repair efforts, as well as in organizing contingency plans to put into effect in the event of failure.

To place our hopes and our trust for the solving of this problem in capitalist hands--the very hands that created the problem and the class that now exhibits a "lack of will" in solving it--is the ultimate folly

Only Socialism, by instituting social ownership and democratic control of the means of life and production for human need, can muster the collective will and the social organization to meet such a problem.

Organize for Socialist Reconstruction!

--George Shand

The preceding article was reprinted from The De Leonist Review, Vol. 4, Number 5, Sept.-Oct. 1998.

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Letters to the Editor

This poem by Maureen Neville was inspired by "The End of Imagination," by Arundhati Roy, reprinted in BPI October 1998 issue. That article dealt with the explosion of nuclear weapons in India and Pakistan

Another Life

by Maureen Neville

The sun, slowly alive, awake, round orange ball on a warm December day, long-past-the-normal Indian summer blast, mid-October harvest moon farewell, brings us our daily bread, clear skies to travel in.

We cannot dream how any of this can end, not even now that India and Pakistan can nuclear detonate.

Science fiction clouds the thoughts -- the day the earth stood still, ground zero.

Another writer warns --
we will mourn the loss of this perfect sunrise, the welcoming daylight, the strange warmth of any late autumn phenomenon named by South American fishermen "El Nino," his sister, "La Nina," for those, too, will be banished Children of the A-bomb, we grew up

with drills and shelters in the years when such threats developed.

Now within the recesses of our collective unconscious, on a strangely warm December morning, from the countries of Gandhi, reincarnation, overcrowding, and the sacred cow we are stirred again to remember and fear.

Stop. Come let us adore the sun, slowly alive, awake, round orange ball on a warm December day.

Come let us remember, remember.
"...You Are The Best Thing That Exists in This World...

Prose Poems by Anne Welsh

(1.) ...you are the best thing that exists in this world -- snow and the sun shining on the diamond sparks, dog that runs in the green wind among the magic water-holding spears of the white rose cat-smelling March asphodels -- young man coming far away slowly under the trees up the path in the 10 o'clock Sunday morning light his coat slung over his shoulder -- a walnut shell boat splashed in blue oar swings on the Naples sea with singing O Sole Mio under the forgetting hot sun and a wind high blowing over spaghetti eaters to loud saxophone tuns a hot white roof with no shade octopus small coiled tentacles volcano grey and grit sand flashing mirror in the sun red shining hairs deep water by the rocks, blue and purple and the black sea urchins making asterisks by the jumping laughing pushing of the brown thin boys who laugh and shout the white splash and the sound of the green changing dive darting deep climbing the turrets of the brown rocks windows of dead faces climbing to light roof of washing moving sun through the opaque window moving life by rocks and green seaweed ribbons freshness and sting of mint and jade crystal and so wind always reverberating the listening shell delicate tawny rose of the gipsy memory under brown shadowed plunge of sun-holding night.

(2.) Bright hot blue of wild glance over the table top, strong blue of the cigar smelling thick paper of the packet glasses full of the dream herb tall as two men by the roadside pale anise yellow ice green cold as the rush of an electric smelling river in the snow bubbling over stones cloudy with glacier whispers of the sparkling fairy ice forest that glitter in the caves and in the blue pine shadows of the death ravines lonely held captive of silence till the crack and the splinters shatter the clear light of the high bowl of eternity but in the room is warmth and the smell of past present and to come food thick garlic thyme and frying potatoes and the stoves is a green-tiled mirror of the men who play cards with strange images, crowned mystery of Queens, knave what do you plan with sideways look on the top of the orange spiking dream of velvet and laces intricate as the Archbishops prayers under the Christmas bells timing another year and the lights of the white humped churchyard tremble before a wind whispering of wolves and the ice deserts by the light of a cold moon far from the roast goose and the children sleeping in three sets of warm clothes tucked by a mother lightly rose-holding in the room draughted with balsam smells.

(3.) flames leaping orange-red-gold-purple-blue, dark in the urgent surge of primeval fire from the world's origins. fiery dungeons, caves and pinnacles towers of collapsing castles, smell of the hissing wood. minature life that runs, the ticking time that tolls the minutes dark and the shadows that run of dreams on the wall galloping to infinity Arabian minarets of gold that flash in the sun in the hyacinth sky by the fountains where the harems bathe to the smells of rose and Turkish delight in the winding of deep sea green with mauve images by the tasseled thick velvet of the couch and the striped zebra waits alone for the new coming of the death-bringing crash to break free into the jungle under the pointsettias, by the bamboo green of the swords waiting to impale the impossible. Tyger Tyger burning bright in the forests of the night what immortal hand or eye could frame thy perfect symmetry where the parrot hoarsely shrieks and red yellow flashes and the stream is slow over the crocodiles who wait forever with pennies on their backs yellow wild burning of the transparent veil that covers the field at midday and early morning green of the beech trees by the sun through blue smoke mist for the workers all day in the dark and noise forgetting the silence of the time holding branches meeting to murmer of ancient mysteries held by grey silver rocks when the owl flies low in the evening and the hares leap and play with the new spring in the wet grass shining with chestnut flowers and the gleam of the horses free and alone.

The prose poems of Anne Welsh have been inspired by Picasso's phrase, "You are the best thing that exists in this world..." She states, "The work is mine entirely, and relates to Italy, Austria and Spain. It is an attempt to capture in words every aspect of the senses, i.e., sight, sound, smell, taste, and it really does recall the occasions completely to me..." Ms. Welsh, who resides in Ontario, Canada, is currently working on a translation of Picasso's prose writings from Spanish into English.
TRANS...COMMUNICATION

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He believes to be the incarnation of Albrecht Dürer. His works include performances, installation, video, graphics, painting, photography, sculpture, music, environment, musical instruments construction, anti-poetry and other means of expression. Since 1969 he has carried out his "life performance": Shoes Art - Trousers Art - Andrzej Dudek-Dürer Art (live sculpture) All over the Places where He Appears. In 1973 he started his projects of The Travel Art in Poland, Western Europe, Mexico, USA, New Zealand and Singapore. He's been a driving force and coordinator of the International Projects in Metaphysics and Telepathy. Documentations and works in public and private collections, e.g. National Museum, Warsaw, Poland; Centro de Arte Actual, Barcelona; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Museum of Modern Art, N.Y.; Tate Gallery, London; City Art Institute Library, Sydney.

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ANDRZEJ DUDEK-DÜRER

is the first in a series of featured artists, in THIS MONTH's SCHOLAR! He resides in Poland, travels widely in Europe and globally, presenting and performing music, graphic, and "live sculpture. Andrzej is the creator of International Projects in Metaphysics and Telepathy.

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For more information please write Ms. Flaxman at Gracie Station, P.O. Box 1638 New York, N.Y. 10128-0054

J.G. Ballard
The Atrocity Exhibition

EINSTEIN: "The notion that this great German-American physicist is a pornographer may strike you as something of a bad joke," Dr Nathan remarked to Webster. "However, you must understand that for Traven science is the ultimate pornography, analytic activity whose main aim is to isolate objects or events from their contexts in time and space. This obsession with the specific activity of quantified functions is what science shares with pornography. How different from Lautreamont, who brought together the sewing machine and the umbrella on the operating table, identifying the pudenda of the carpet with the woof of the cadaver," Dr Nathan turned to Webster with a laugh. "One looks forward to the day when the General Theory of Relativity and the Principia will outsell the Kama Sutra in back street bookshops."

From: nick herbert <quanta@cruzio.com>
To: newphysics@mail.msr-wetware.com
Subject: hard science
Date: Thu, 4 Mar 1999 11:04:55 -0800

That is assuming that "real" is the desired state! Amy Flaxman
In this document author Natasha Bernstein evokes the rhythms of daily life in Belfast, Maine, and recounts the influence of alternative-culture icon Bern Porter in his multiple roles as her benefactor, mentor, lover, nemesis, and straight man.

Sometimes funny, sometimes tender, sometimes cruel, and often incisive, Natasha's observations and interactions with Bern unfold on a dual time line: While written mostly in September, 1998, Natasha intersperses her narrative with earlier dialogs between herself and Bern, excerpts from her "Belfast Journal," and in flashbacks concerning her most recent sojourn with Bern in February-March, 1998, while helping him as he recovered from a fractured pelvis.

Bern believes in the saving grace of Art. He believes in the power of Image and Word to transform our lives. It is a good legacy to leave to those that come after—this faith in the human mind and heart and spirit, faith in the creative impulse: Life against death, war, greed, pettiness, folly, cruelty, fear...

Art = Life Affirmation
Art = Immortality
—Natasha Bernstein

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And as I said, Bern and I are a laugh a minute.

BERN: I'd like to know how my house plants got out on the porch, dear.

ME: Well, I can tell you that. I put them there because they're dead.

BERN: Dead?

ME: Yes, Bern, dead.

BERN: Well, I don't want them to be dead.

ME: Well, whether you want it or not, dear, they're dead.

BERN: I'd like a second opinion.

*****

BERN: (philosophically, over breakfast) What is an orange?

ME: It's a round thing the color of the sun. (Philosophically, quoting Bern who has often asked:) "What is a dog?"

BERN: I'll bite.

ME: No, the dog'll bite!

*****

ME: (crossing with Bern, after car has stopped) I like the way you just stop traffic, dear.

BERN: Yes, well, they're supposed to stop.

ME: Yes, well, they're supposed to. But what makes you think they WILL?

BERN: Yes, well, that's an interesting point.

RETURN TO BELFAST

by Natasha Bernstein

Afterword by
Bern Porter

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