

AMERICA

Middle class blues

PHILADELPHIA Inquirer reporters Donald L. Bartlett and James B. Steele wrote a nine-part series examining the dismantling of the USA called "America: What Went Wrong?". It appeared in The Philadelphia Inquirer from October 20 to 28 1991, and was so popular that it is being expanded into a paperback book with the same title, writes Sandy Cameron from Vancouver.

The main theme is that "those who have the power to make the rules by which the economy operates have...rigged the game...to favour the privileged, the powerful and the influential. At the expense of everyone else." Corporate leaders generally criticise government, and then use it shamelessly to get the legislation they want. Ordinary citizens often hold the view that government couldn't run a two-car funeral, and sometimes we are not well-informed about the legislation that shapes our lives. Also, we are led to believe that "the market" dictates what happens to our economy, and that there is nothing we can do about it.

Bartlett and Steele show the American working/middle class that they are being clobbered by legislation that works against them. The case is made in plain language with many concrete examples from the lives of people who have become unemployed, poor, and desperate.

In the authors' view, the approximately 34 million individuals and families in the U.S. who earned wages and filed federal tax returns for 1989 reporting incomes between \$20,000 and \$50,000, represents the heart of America's working/middle class. The median family income in the U.S. in 1989 was \$34,213.

Bartlett and Steele demonstrate that the rules which govern the corporate game (agenda) have (1) created a tax system that is firmly weighted against the working/middle class; (2) granted subsidies to businesses that create low wage jobs that are eroding living standards; (3) undermined longtime stable businesses and communities; and (4) placed home ownership out of the reach of a growing number of citizens. In short, the working/middle class is being dismantled.

Part 5 of the series is on deregulation, and we in Canada could learn much from the disasters to the trucking and airline industries in the U.S. after deregulation. Since deregulation in 1978, a dozen airlines have merged or gone out of business. More than 50,000 of their employees have lost their jobs. Since deregulation of the trucking industry in 1980, more than 100 once-thriving trucking companies have gone out of business, and more than 150,000 workers at those companies have lost their jobs.

The last article is about the lobbying of special interest groups such as corporations. In Washington, 11,000 organisations are lobbying Congress, and the great majority of them speak for the rich. The lobbyists not only push for legislation that benefits the wealthy, but they stop legislation that might move America in the direction of a more democratic society. For example, it is because of such lobbies that Congress has failed to rewrite the laws that permit wealthy citizens to pay combined income tax and social security taxes at a rate well below that paid by

individuals and families earning less than \$20,000 a year. It is because of such lobbies that Congress has failed to do anything about the 40 million Americans who are going without health care insurance and millions more who have insurance that provides only limited protection.

Although these articles are about the dismantling of the American working/middle class, they are relevant to Canada, because the same process is happening here. Writers such as Linda McQuaig in "The Quick and the Dead" have documented the Canadian corporate agenda. To build global solidarity, it is important to know how ordinary folk are being clobbered in other parts of the world.

Bartlett and Steele predict that the 1990s will be as disastrous for the working/middle class as the 1980s, and that the corporate global economy will be to the 1990s and beyond what corporate restructuring in the U.S. was in the 1980s.

Unless, of course...

* 'America: What Went Wrong?' is published by Andrews and McMeel in Kansas City, Missouri.

BRITAIN'S BIG ISSUE

While thousands of homeless people sleep in the streets at night, over 760,000 houses and flats stand empty in Britain. There are an estimated 638,000 empty houses owned by private landlords, 83,000 by local councils, 31,000 by government departments and 16,000 by housing associations.

GEORGE GOES JAPANESE

A CLASSIC 19th century book on political economy written by social reformer Henry George has been re-published in Japan. *Progress and Poverty*, originally published in 1879, became one of the best-selling non-fiction works ever - and one of the most widely-read books on economics. It has now been translated by Prof. Yoshisaburo Yamasaki, emeritus professor of Kobe University, and published last year in Tokyo.

In Budapest, the Hungarian translation of Henry George's *The Condition of Labor* has also been re-printed. This was followed by the publication of a book which was written by the late Sos Aladar 50 years ago. Mr. Aladar was an advocate of the philosophy of Henry George. Because of the world war, publication was interrupted, and the MS gathered dust until last year. It was presented to the press by Goncz Arpad, the President of Hungary, who had been a friend of the author.

According to Balazs Konya - who is now seeking support for the publication of his Hungarian edition (with an English translation) of *Perspectives of Henry George's Thoughts and Ideas* - the new interest in the Georgist philosophy is timely.

He told *Land & Liberty*: "The very rapid political changes occurring in the world - especially in Eastern Europe - make it necessary to reappraise all the practical possibilities concerning Henry George's teaching."