

# Huey Newton: Speech At Boston College

Speech originally given at Boston College on November 18, 1970.



Power to the people, brothers and sisters. I would like to thank you for my presence here tonight because you are responsible for it. I would be in a maximum-security penitentiary if it were not for the power of the people.

Chairman, for Ericka Huggins, for Angela Davis, for the New York 21 and the Soledad Brothers. For all political prisoners and prisoners of war. On the 28th and 29th of November we will have a People's Revolutionary Constitutional convention in Washington, D.C. We cannot have that convention if the people do not come. After all, the people are the makers of world history and responsible for everything.

How can we have a convention if we have no people? Some believe a people's convention is possible without the people being there. As I recall, that was the case in 1777.

Tonight, I would like to outline for you the Black Panther Party's program and explain how we arrived at our ideological position and why we feel it necessary to institute a Ten-Point Program. A Ten-Point Program is not revolutionary in itself, nor is it reformist. It is a survival program. We, the people, are threatened with genocide because racism and fascism are rampant in this country and throughout the world. And the ruling circle in North America is responsible. We intend to change all of that, and in order to change it, there must be a total transformation. But until we can achieve that total transformation, we must exist. In order to exist, we must survive; therefore, we need a survival kit: the Ten-Point Program. It is necessary for our children to grow up healthy with functional and creative minds. They cannot do this if they do not get the correct nutrition. That is why we have a breakfast program for children. We also have community health programs. We have a busing program. We call it "The Bus for Relatives and Parents of Prisoners," We realize that the fascist regime that operates the prisons throughout America would like to do their treachery in the dark. But if we get the relatives, parents, and friends to the prisons they can expose the treachery of the fascists. This too is a survival program.

We must not regard our survival programs as an answer to the whole problem of oppression. We don't even claim it to be a revolutionary program. Revolutions are made of sterner stuff. We do say that if the people are not here revolution cannot be achieved, for the people and only the people make revolutions.

The theme of our Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention is "Survival Through Service to the People." At our convention we will present our total survival program. It is a program that works very much like the first-aid kit that is used when a plane falls and you find yourself in the middle of the sea on a rubber raft. You need a few things to last until you can get to the shore, until you can get to that oasis where you can be happy and healthy. If you do not have the things necessary to get you to that shore, then you will probably not exist. At this time the ruling circle threatens us to the extent that we are afraid that we might not exist to see the next day or see the revolution. The Black Panther Party will not accept the total destruction of the people. As a matter of fact, we have drawn a line of demarcation and we will no longer tolerate fascism, aggression, brutality, and murder of any kind. We will not sit around and allow ourselves to be murdered. Each person has an obligation to preserve himself. If he does not preserve himself then I accuse him of suicide: reactionary suicide because reactionary conditions will have caused his death. If we do nothing we are accepting the situation and allowing ourselves to die. We will not accept that. If the alternatives are very narrow we still will not sit around, we will not die the death of the Jews in Germany. We would rather die the death of the Jews in Warsaw!

Where there is courage, where there is self-respect and dignity, there is a possibility that we can change the conditions and win. This is a possibility that we can change the conditions and win. This is called revolutionary enthusiasm and it is the kind of struggle that is needed

in order to guarantee a victory. If we must die, then we will die the death of a revolutionary suicide that says, "If I am put down, if I am driven out, I refuse to be swept out with a broom. I would much rather be driven out with a stick because if I am swept out with the broom it will humiliate me and I will lose my self-respect. But if I am driven out with the stick, then, at least, I can claim the dignity of a man and die the death of a man rather than the death of a dog."

Of course, our real desire is to live, but we will not be cowed, we will not be intimidated.

I would like to explain to you the method that the Black Panther Party used to arrive at our ideological position, and more than that, I would like to give to you a framework or a process of thinking that might help us solve the problems and the contradictions that exist today. Before we approach the problem we must get a clear picture of what is really going on; a clear image divorced from the attitudes and emotions that we usually project into a situation. We must be as objective as possible without accepting dogma, letting the facts speak for themselves. But we will not remain totally objective; we will become subjective in the application of the knowledge received from the external world. We will use the scientific method to acquire this knowledge, but we will openly acknowledge our ultimate subjectivity. Once we apply knowledge in order to will a certain outcome our objectivity ends and our subjectivity begins. We call this integrating theory with practice, and this is what the Black Panther Party is all about.

In order to understand a group of forces operating at the same time, science developed what is called the scientific method. One of the characteristics or properties of this method is disinterest. Not uninterest, but disinterest: no special interest in the outcome. In other words, the scientist does not promote an outcome, he just collects the facts. Nevertheless, in acquiring his facts he must begin with a basic premise. Most basic premises stem from a set of assumptions because it is very difficult to test a first premise without these assumptions. After an agreement is reached on certain assumptions, an intelligent argument can follow, for then logic and consistency are all that is required to reach a valid conclusion.

Tonight I ask you to assume that an external world exists. An external world that exists independently of us. The second assumption I would like for you to make is that things are in a constant state of change, transformation, or flux. With agreement on these two assumptions we can go on with our discussion.

The scientific method relies heavily on empiricism. But the problem with empiricism is that it tells you very little about the future; it tells you only about the past, about information which you have already discovered through observation and experience. It always refers to past experience.

Long after the rules of empirical knowledge had been ascertained, a man by the name of Karl Marx integrated these rules with a theory developed by Immanuel Kant called rationale. Kant called his process of reasoning pure reason because it did not depend on the external world. Instead it only depended on consistency in manipulating symbols in order to come up with a conclusion based upon reason. For example, in this sentence "If the sky is above my head when I turn my head upwards, I will see the sky" there is nothing wrong with the conclusion. As a matter of fact, it is accurate. But I haven't said anything about the existence of the sky. I said "if" With rationale we are not dependent upon the external world. With empiricism we can tell very little about the future. So what will we do? What Marx did. In order to understand what was happening in the world Marx found it necessary to integrate rationale with empiricism. He called his concept dialectical materialism. If, like Marx, we integrate these two concepts or these two ways of thinking, not only are we in touch with the world outside us but we can also explain the constant state of transformation. Therefore, we can also make some predictions about the outcome of certain social phenomena that is not only in constant change but also in conflict.

Marx, as a social scientist, criticized other social scientists for attempting to explain phenomena, or one phenomenon, by taking it out of its environment, isolating it, putting it into a category, and not acknowledging the fact that once it was taken out of its environment the phenomenon was transformed. For example, if in a discipline such as sociology we study the activity of groups - how they hold together and why they fall apart - without understanding everything else related to that group, we may arrive at a false conclusion about the nature of the group. What Marx attempted to do was to develop a way of thinking that would explain phenomena realistically.

When atoms collide, in physics, they divide into electrons, protons, and neutrons, if I remember correctly. What happened to the atom? It was transformed. In the social world a similar thing happens. We can apply the same principle. When two cultures collide a process or condition occurs which the sociologists call acculturation: the modification of cultures as a result of their contact with each other. Marx called the collision of social forces or classes a contradiction. In the physical world, when forces collide we sometimes call it just that - a collision. For example, when two cars meet head on, trying to occupy the same space at the same time, both are transformed. Sometimes other things happen. Had those two cars been turned back to back and sped off in opposite directions they would not be a contradiction; they would be contrary, covering different spaces at different times. Sometimes when people meet they argue and misunderstand each other because they think they are having a contradiction when they are only being contrary. For example, I can say the wall is ten feet tall and you can say the wall is red, and we can argue all day thinking we are having a contradiction when actually we are only being contrary. When people argue, when one offers a thesis and the other offers an anti-thesis, we say there is a contradiction and hope that if we argue long enough, provided that we agree on one premise, we can have some

kind of synthesis. Tonight I hope I can have some form of agreement or synthesis with those who have criticized the Black Panther Party.

I think that the mistake is that some people have taken the apparent as the actual fact in spite of their claims of scholarly research and following the discipline of dialectical materialism. They fail to search deeper, as the scientist is required to do, to get beyond the apparent and come up with the more significant. Let me explain how this relates to the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party is a Marxist-Leninist party because we follow the dialectical method and we also integrate theory with practice. We are not mechanical Marxists and we are not historical materialists. Some people think they are Marxists when actually they are following the thoughts of Hegel. Some people think they are Marxist-Leninists but they refuse to be creative, and are, therefore, tied to the past. They are tied to a rhetoric that does not apply to the present set of conditions. They are tied to a set of thoughts that approaches dogma - what we call flunkeyism.

Marx attempted to set up a framework which could be applied to a number of conditions. And in applying this framework we cannot be afraid of the outcome because things change and we must be willing to acknowledge that change because we are objective. If we are using the method of dialectical materialism we don't expect to find anything the same even one minute later because "one minute later" is history. If things are in a constant state of change, we cannot expect them to be the same. Words used to describe old phenomena may be useless to describe the new. And if we use the old words to describe new events we run the risk of confusing people and misleading them into thinking that things are static.

In 1917 an event occurred in the Soviet Union that was called a revolution. Two classes had a contradiction and the whole country was transformed. In this country, 1970, the Black Panther Party issued a document. Our Minister of Information, Eldridge Cleaver, who now is in Algeria, wrote a pamphlet called "On the Ideology of the Black Panther Party." In that work Eldridge Cleaver stated that neither the proletarians nor the industrial workers carry the potentialities for revolution in this country at this time. He claimed that the left wing of the proletarians, the lumpen proletarians, have that revolutionary potential, and in fact, acting as the vanguard, they would carry the people of the world to the final climax of the transformation of society. It has been stated by some people, by some parties, by some organizations, by the Progressive Labor Party, that revolution is impossible. How can the lumpen proletarians carry out a successful socialist transformation when they are only a minority? And in fact how can they do it when history shows that only the proletarians have carried out a successful social revolution? I agree that it is necessary for the people who carry out a social revolution to represent the popular majority's interests. It is necessary for this group to represent the broad masses of the people. We analyzed what happened in the Soviet Union in 1917. I also agree that the lumpen proletarians are the minority in this country. No disagreement. Have I contradicted myself? It only goes to show that what's

apparent might not actually be a fact. What appears to be a contradiction may be only a paradox. Let's examine this apparent contradiction.

The Soviet Union, in 1917, was basically an agricultural society with very large peasantry. A set of social conditions existing there at that time was responsible for the development of a small industrial base. The people who worked in this industrial base were called proletarians. Lenin, using Marx's theory, saw the trends. He was not a historical materialist, but a dialectical materialist, and therefore very interested in the ever-changing status of things. He saw that while the proletarians were a minority in 1917, they had the potential to carry out a revolution because their class was increasing and the peasantry was declining. That was one of the conditions. The proletarians were destined to be a popular force. They also had access to the properties necessary for carrying out a socialist revolution.

In this country the Black Panther Party, taking careful note of the dialectical method, taking careful note of the social trends and the ever-changing nature of things, sees that while the lumpen proletarians are the minority and the proletarians are the majority, technology is developing at such a rapid rate that automation will progress to cybernation, and cybernation probably to technocracy. As I came into town I saw MIT over the way. If the ruling circle remains in power it seems to me that capitalists will continue to develop their technological machinery because they are not interested in the people. Therefore, I expect from them the logic that they have always followed: to make as much money as possible, and pay the people as little as possible - until the people demand more, and finally demand their heads. If revolution does not occur almost immediately, and I say almost immediately because technology is making leaps (it made a leap all the way to the moon), and if the ruling circle remains in power the proletarian working class will definitely be on the decline because they will be unemployables and therefore swell the ranks of the lumpens, who are the present unemployables. Every worker is in jeopardy because of the ruling circle, which is why we say that the lumpen proletarians have the potential for revolution, will probably carry out the revolution, and in the near future will be the popular majority. Of course, I would not like to see more of my people unemployed or become unemployables, but being objective, because we're dialectical materialists, we must acknowledge the facts.

Marx outlined a rough process of the development of society. He said that society goes from a slave class to a feudalistic class structure to a capitalistic class structure to a socialistic class structure and finally to communism. Or in other words, from capitalist state to socialist state to nonstate: communism. I think we can all agree that the slave class in the world has virtually been transformed into the wage slave. In other words, the slave class in the world no longer exists as a significant force, and if we agree to that we can agree that classes can be transformed literally out of existence. If this is so, if the slave class can disappear and become something else - or not disappear but just be transformed - and take on other characteristics, then it is also true that the proletarians or the industrial working class can

possibly be transformed out of existence. Of course the people themselves would not disappear; they would only take on other attributes. The attribute that I am interested in is the fact that soon the ruling circle will not need the workers, and if the ruling circle is in control of the means of production the working class will become unemployables or lumpens. That is logical; that is dialectical. I think it would be wrong to say that only the slave class could disappear.

Marx was a very intelligent man. He was not a dogmatist. Once he said, "One thing I'm not, I'm not a Marxist." In those words, he was trying to tell the Progressive Labor Party and others not to accept the past as the present or the future, but to understand it and be able to predict what might happen in the future and therefore act in an intelligent way to bring about the revolution that we all want.

After taking those things into consideration we see that as time changes and the world is transformed we need some new definitions, for if we keep using the old terms people might think the old situation still exists. I would be amazed if the same conditions that existed in 1917 were still existing today.

You know Marx and Lenin were pretty lazy dudes when it came to working for somebody. They looked at toil, working for your necessities, as something of a curse. And Lenin's whole theory, after he put Marx's analysis into practice, was geared to get rid of the proletarians. In other words, when the proletarian class or the working class seized the means of production, they would plan their society in such a way as to be free from toil. As a matter of fact, Lenin saw a time in which man could stand in one place, push buttons and move mountains. It sounds to me as though he saw a proletarian working class transformed and in possession of a free block of time, to indulge in productive creativity, to think about developing their universe, so that they could have the happiness, the freedom, and the pleasure that all men seek and value.

Today's capitalist has developed machinery to such a point that he can hire a group of specialized people called technocrats. In the near future he will certainly do more of this, and the technocrat will be too specialized to be identified as a proletarian. In fact that group of technocrats will be so vital we will have to do something to explain the presence of other people; we will have to come up with another definition and reason for existing.

But we must not confine our discussion to theory; we must have practical application of our theory to come up with anything worthwhile. In spite of the criticism that we have received from certain people, the Party has a practical application of its theories. Many of our activities provide the working class and the unemployed with a reason and a means for existing in the future. The people will not disappear-not with our survival programs they will not. They will still be around.

The Black Panther Party says it is perfectly correct to organize the proletarians because after they are kicked out of the factory and are called unemployable or lumpen, they still want to live, and in order to live they have to eat. It is in the proletarian's own best interest to seize the machinery that he has made in order to produce in abundance, so he and his brethren can live. We will not wait until the proletarian becomes the lumpen proletarian to educate him. Today we must lift the consciousness of the people. The wind is rising and the rivers flowing, times are getting hard and we can't go home again. We can't go back to our mother's womb, nor can we go back to 1917.

The United States, or what I like to call North America, was transformed at the hands of the ruling circle from a nation to an empire. This caused a total change in the world, because no part of an interrelated thing can change and leave everything else the same. So when the United States, or North America, became an empire it changed the whole composition of the world. There were other nations in the world. But "empire" means that the ruling circle who lives in the empire (the imperialists) control other nations. Now some time ago there existed a phenomenon we called-well, I call - primitive empire. An example of that would be the Roman Empire because the Romans controlled all of what was thought to be the known world. In fact they did not know all of the world, therefore some nations still existed independent of it. Now, probably all of the world is known. The United States as an empire necessarily controls the whole world either directly or indirectly.

If we understand dialectics we know that every determination brings about a limitation and every limitation brings about a determination. In other words, while one force may give rise to one thing it might crush other things, including itself. We might call this concept "the negation of the negation." So, while in 1917 the ruling circle created an industrial base and used the system of capitalism they were also creating the necessary conditions for socialism. They were doing this because in a socialist society it is necessary to have some centralization of the wealth, some equal distribution of the wealth, and some harmony among the people.

Now, I will give you roughly some characteristics that any people who call themselves a nation should have. These are economic independence, cultural determination, control of the political institutions, territorial integrity, and safety.

In 1966 we called our Party a Black Nationalist Party. We called ourselves Black Nationalists because we thought that nationhood was the answer. Shortly after that we decided that what was really needed was revolutionary nationalism, that is, nationalism plus socialism. After analyzing conditions a little more, we found that it was impractical and even contradictory. Therefore, we went to a higher level of consciousness. We saw that in order to be free we had to crush the ruling circle and therefore we had to unite with the peoples of the world. So we called ourselves Internationalists. We sought solidarity with the peoples



of the world. We sought solidarity with what we thought were the nations of the world. But then what happened? We found that because everything is in a constant state of transformation, because of the development of technology, because of the development of the mass media, because of the fire power of the imperialist, and because of the fact that the United States is no longer a nation but an empire, nations could not exist, for they did not have the criteria for nationhood. Their self-determination, economic determination, and cultural determination has been transformed by the imperialists and the ruling circle. They were no longer nations. We found that in order to be Internationalists we had to be also Nationalists, or at least acknowledge nationhood. Internationalism, if I understand the word, means the interrelationship among a group of nations. But since no nation exists, and since the United States is in fact an empire, it is impossible for us to be Internationalists.

These transformations and phenomena require us to call ourselves "intercommunalists" because nations have been transformed into communities of the world. The Black Panther Party now disclaims internationalism and supports intercommunalism.

Marx and Lenin felt, with the information they had, that when the non-state finally came to be a reality, it would be caused or ushered in by the people and by communism. A strange thing happened. The ruling reactionary circle, through the consequence of being imperialists, transformed the world into what we call "Reactionary Intercommunalism." They laid siege upon all the communities of the world, dominating the institutions to such an extent that the people were not served by the institutions in their own land. The Black Panther Party would like to reverse that trend and lead the people of the world into the age of "Revolutionary Intercommunalism." This would be the time when the people seize the means of production and distribute the wealth and the technology in an egalitarian way to the many communities of the world.

We see very little difference in what happens to a community here in North America and what happens to a community in Vietnam. We see very little difference in what happens, even culturally, to a Chinese community in San Francisco and a Chinese community in Hong Kong. We see very little difference in what happens to a Black community in Harlem and a Black community in South America, a Black community in Angola and one in Mozambique. We see very little difference.

So, what has actually happened, is that the non-state has already been accomplished, but it is reactionary. A community by way of definition is a comprehensive collection of institutions that serve the people who live there. It differs from a nation because a community evolves around a greater structure that we usually call the state, and the state has certain control over the community if the administration represents the people or if the administration happens to be the people's commissar. It is not so at this time, so there's still something to be done. I mentioned earlier the "negation of the negation," I mentioned earlier the

necessity for the redistribution of wealth. We think that it is very important to know that as things are in the world today socialism in the United States will never exist. Why? It will not exist because it cannot exist. It cannot at this time exist anywhere in the world. Socialism would require a socialist state, and if a state does not exist how could socialism exist? So how do we define certain progressive countries such as the People's Republic of China? How do we describe certain progressive countries, or communities as we call them, as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea?

How do we define certain communities such as North Vietnam and the provisional government in the South? How do we explain these communities if in fact they too cannot claim nationhood? We say this: we say they represent the people's liberated territory. They represent a community liberated. But that community is not sufficient, it is not satisfied, just as the National Liberation Front is not satisfied with the liberated territory in the South. It is only the groundwork and preparation for the liberation of the world-seizing the wealth from the ruling circle, equal distribution and proportional representation in an intercommunal framework. This is what the Black Panther Party would like to achieve with the help of the power of the people, because without the people nothing can be achieved.

I stated that in the United States socialism would never exist. In order for a revolution to occur in the United States you would have to have a redistribution of wealth not on a national or an international level, but on an intercommunal level. Because how can we say that we have accomplished revolution if we redistribute the wealth just to the people here in North America when the ruling circle itself is guilty of trespass de bonis asportatis. That is, they have taken away the goods of the people of the world, transported them to America and used them as their very own.

In 1917, when the revolution occurred, there could be a redistribution of wealth on a national level because nations existed. Now, if you talk in terms of planning an economy on a world-wide level, on an intercommunal level, you are saying something important: that the people have been ripped off very much like one country being ripped off. Simple reparation is not enough because the people have not only been robbed of their raw materials, but of the wealth accrued from the investment of those materials-an investment which has created the technological machine. The people of the world will have to have control - not a limited share of control for "X" amount of time, but total control forever.

In order to plan a real intercommunal economy we will have to acknowledge how the world is hooked up. We will also have to acknowledge that nations have not existed for some time. Some people will argue that nations still exist because of the cultural differences. By way of definition, just for practical argument, culture is a collection of learned patterns of behavior. Here in the United States Black people, Africans, were raped from the mother country, and consequently we have literally lost most of our African values. Perhaps we still hold on to

some surviving Africanisms, but by and large you can see the transformation which was achieved by time and the highly technological society whose tremendous mass media functions as an indoctrination center. The ruling circle has launched satellites in order to project a beam across the earth and indoctrinate the world, and while there might be some cultural differences, these differences are not qualitative but quantitative. In other words, if technology and the ruling circle go on as they are now the people of the world will be conditioned to adopt Western values. (I think Japan is a good example.) The differences between people are getting very small, but again that is in the interest of the ruling circle. I do not believe that history can be backtracked. If the world is really that interconnected then we have to acknowledge that and say that in order for the people to be free, they will have to control the institutions of their community, and have some form of representation in the technological center that they have produced. The United States, in order to correct its robbery of the world, will have to first return much of which it has stolen. I don't see how we can talk about socialism when the problem is world distribution. I think this is what Marx meant when he talked about the non-state.

I was at Alex Haley's house some time ago and he talked to me about his search for his past. He found it in Africa but when he returned there shortly afterward, he was in a state of panic. His village hadn't changed very much, but when he went there he saw an old man walking down the road, holding something that he cherished to his car. It was a small transistor radio that was zeroed in on the British broadcasting network. What I'm trying to say is that mass media plus the development of transportation make it impossible for us to think of ourselves in terms of separate entities, as nations. Do you realize that it only took me approximately five hours to get from San Francisco to here? It only takes ten hours to get from here to Vietnam. The ruling circle no longer even acknowledges wars; they call them "police actions." They call the riots of the Vietnamese people "domestic disturbance." What I am saying is that the ruling circle must realize and accept the consequences of what they have done. They know that there is only one world, but they are determined to follow the logic of their exploitation.

A short time ago in Detroit, the community was under siege, and now sixteen members of the Party are in prison. The local police laid siege on that community and that house, and they used the same weapons they use in Vietnam (as a matter of fact, two tanks rolled up). The same thing happens in Vietnam because the "police" are there also. The "police" are everywhere and they all wear the same uniform and use the same tools, and have the same purpose: the protection of the ruling circle here in North America. It is true that the world is one community, but we are not satisfied with the concentration of its power. We want the power for the people.

I said earlier (but I strayed away) that the theory of the "negation of the negation" is valid. Some scholars have been wondering why in Asia, Africa, and Latin America the resistance

always seeks the goal of a collective society. They seem not to institute the economy of the capitalist. They seem to jump all the way from feudalism to a collective society, and some people can't understand why. Why won't they follow historical Marxism, or historical materialism? Why won't they go from feudalism to the development of a capitalistic base and finally to socialism? They don't do it because they can't do it. They don't do it for the same reason that the Black community in Harlem cannot develop capitalism, that the Black community in Oakland or San Francisco cannot develop capitalism, because the imperialists have already pre-empted the field. They have already centralized the wealth. Therefore, in order to deal with them all we can do is liberate our community and then move on them as a collective force.

We've had long arguments with people about our convictions. Before we became conscious we used to call ourselves a dispersed collection of colonies here in North America. And people argued with me all day and all night, asking, "How can you possibly be a colony? In order to be a colony you have to have a nation, and you're not a nation, you're a community. You're a dispersed collection of communities." Because the Black Panther Party is not embarrassed to change or admit error, tonight I would like to accept the criticism and say that those critics were absolutely right. We are a collection of communities just as the Korean people, the Vietnamese people, and the Chinese people are a collection of communities—a dispersed collection of communities because we have no superstructure of our own. The superstructure we have is the superstructure of Wall Street, which all of our labor produced. This is a distorted form of collectivity. Everything's been collected but it's used exclusively in the interest of the ruling circle. This is why the Black Panther Party denounces Black capitalism and says that all we can do is liberate our community, not only in Vietnam but here, not only in Cambodia and the People's Republics of China and Korea but the communities of the world. We must unite as one community and then transform the world into a place where people will be happy, wars will end, the state itself will no longer exist, and we will have communism. But we cannot do this right away. When transformation takes place, when structural change takes place, the result is usually cultural lag. After the people possess the means of production we will probably not move directly into communism but linger with Revolutionary Intercommunalism until such time as we can wash away bourgeois thought, until such time as we can wash away racism and reactionary thinking, until such time as people are not attached to their nation as a peasant is attached to the soil, until such time as that people can gain their sanity and develop a culture that is "essentially human," that will serve the people instead of some god. Because we cannot avoid contact with each other we will have to develop a value system that will help us function together in harmony.

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# Richard Smith: Capitalism and the Destruction of Life on Earth: Six Theses on Saving the Humans

This article was originally published Nov 10, 2013 in [Truthout](#).



*As global capitalist economic growth accelerates planetary ecological collapse, this article, originally published on November 10, 2013, argues that – impossible as it may seem at present – only the most radical solution – the overthrow of global capitalism, the construction of a mostly publicly-owned and mostly planned eco-socialist economy based on global “contraction and convergence,” on substantial de-industrialization, on sharing, on much less work and much more play and on bottom-up democratic management – is, in fact, the only alternative to the collapse of civilization and ecological suicide.*

When, on May 10, 2013, scientists at Mauna Loa Observatory on the big island of Hawaii announced that global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions had crossed a threshold at 400 parts per million for the first time in millions of years, a sense of dread spread around the world – not only among climate scientists.

CO2 emissions have been relentlessly climbing since Charles David Keeling first set up his tracking station near the summit of Mauna Loa Observatory in 1958 to monitor average daily global CO2 levels. At that time, CO2 concentrations registered 315ppm. CO2 emissions and atmospheric concentrations have been climbing ever since and, as the records show, temperatures rises will follow. For all the climate summits, the promises of “voluntary restraint,” the carbon trading and carbon taxes, the growth of CO2 emissions and atmospheric concentrations has not just been relentless, it has been accelerating in what scientists have dubbed the “Keeling Curve.”

In the early 1960s, CO2ppm concentrations in the atmosphere grew by 0.7ppm per year. In recent decades, especially as China has industrialized, the growth rate has tripled to 2.1ppm per year. In just the first 17 weeks of 2013, CO2 levels jumped by 2.74ppm compared to last year — “the biggest increase since benchmark monitoring stations high on the Hawaiian volcano of Mauna Loa began taking measurements in 1958.”[1] Carbon concentrations have not been this high since the Pliocene period, between 3 million and 5 million years ago, when global average temperatures were 3 degrees or 4 degrees Centigrade hotter than today, the Arctic was ice-free, sea levels were about 40 meters higher, jungles covered northern Canada and Florida was under water - along with coastal locations we now call New York City, London, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Sydney and many others.

Crossing this threshold has fueled fears that we are fast approaching “tipping points” - melting of the subarctic tundra or thawing and releasing the vast quantities of methane in the Arctic sea bottom - that will accelerate global warming beyond any human capacity to stop it: “I wish it weren’t true, but it looks like the world is going to blow through the 400-ppm level without losing a beat,” said Scripps Institute geochemist Ralph Keeling, whose father, Charles, set up the first monitoring stations in 1958: “At this pace, we’ll hit 450 ppm within a few decades.”

“It feels like the inevitable march toward disaster,” said Maureen E. Raymo, a scientist at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, a unit of Columbia University.[2]

Why are we marching to disaster, “sleepwalking to extinction” as *The Guardian’s* George Monbiot once put it? Why can’t we slam on the brakes before we ride off the cliff to collapse? I’m going to argue here that the problem is rooted in the requirements of capitalist reproduction, that large corporations are destroying life on Earth, that they can’t help themselves, they can’t change or change very much, that so long as we live under this system we have little choice but to go along in this destruction, to keep pouring on the gas instead of slamming on the brakes.

The only alternative - impossible as this may seem right now - is to overthrow this global economic system and all of the governments of the 1% that prop it up and replace them with

a global economic democracy, a radical bottom-up political democracy, an ecosocialist civilization. I argue that, although we are fast approaching the precipice of ecological collapse, the means to derail this train wreck are in the making as, around the world, we are witnessing a near-simultaneous global mass democratic “awakening,” as the Brazilians call it, almost a global uprising from Tahir Square to Zuccotti Park, from Athens to Istanbul to Beijing and beyond such as the world has never seen.

To be sure, like Occupy Wall Street, these movements are still inchoate, still mainly protesting what’s wrong rather than fighting for an alternative social order. Like Occupy, they have yet to clearly and robustly answer that crucial question, “Don’t like capitalism? What’s your alternative?” Yet they are working on it, and they are for the most part instinctively and radically democratic. And in this lies our hope. I’m going to make my case in the form of six theses:

## 1. CAPITALISM IS, OVERWHELMINGLY, THE MAIN DRIVER OF PLANETARY ECOLOGICAL COLLAPSE

From climate change to resource overconsumption to pollution, the engine that has powered three centuries of accelerating economic development revolutionizing technology, science, culture and human life itself is today a roaring, out-of-control locomotive mowing down continents of forests, sweeping oceans of life, clawing out mountains of minerals, drilling, pumping out lakes of fuels, devouring the planet’s last accessible resources to turn them all into “product” while destroying fragile global ecologies built up over eons.

Between 1950 and 2000 the global human population more than doubled from 2.5 billion to 6 billion. But in these same decades, consumption of major natural resources soared more than sixfold on average, some much more. Natural gas consumption grew nearly twelvefold, bauxite (aluminum ore) fifteenfold. And so on.[\[3\]](#)

At current rates, Harvard biologist E.O Wilson says, “half the world’s great forests have already been leveled, and half the world’s plant and animal species may be gone by the end of this century.” Corporations aren’t necessarily evil – although plenty are diabolically evil – but they can’t help themselves. They’re just doing what they’re supposed to do for the benefit of their shareholders. Shell Oil can’t help but loot Nigeria and the Arctic and cook the climate. That’s what shareholders demand.[\[4\]](#) BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto and other mining giants can’t resist mining Australia’s abundant coal and exporting it to China and India. Mining accounts for 19 percent of Australia’s gross domestic product and substantial employment even as coal combustion is the worst driver of global warming. IKEA can’t help but level the forests of Siberia and Malaysia to feed the Chinese mills building its flimsy, disposable furniture (IKEA is the third-largest consumer of lumber in the world). Apple can’t help it if the cost of extracting the “rare earths” it needs to make millions of new iThings



each year is the destruction of the eastern Congo - violence, rape, slavery, forced induction of child soldiers, along with poisoning local waterways. [5] Monsanto and DuPont and Syngenta and Bayer Crop Science have no choice but to wipe out bees, butterflies, birds and small farmers and extinguish crop diversity to secure their grip on the world's food supply while drenching the planet with their Roundups and Atrazines and neonicotinoids. [6] This is how giant corporations are wiping out life on Earth in the course of a routine business day. And the bigger the corporations grow, the worse the problems become.

In Adam Smith's day, when the first factories and mills produced hat pins and iron tools and rolls of cloth by the thousands, capitalist freedom to make whatever they wanted didn't much matter because they didn't have much impact on the global environment. But now everything is produced in the millions and billions - then trashed today and reproduced all over again tomorrow. When the planet is looted and polluted to support all this frantic and senseless growth, it matters - a lot.

The world's climate scientists tell us we're facing a planetary emergency. They've been telling us since the 1990s that if we don't cut global fossil-fuel greenhouse-gas emissions by 80 percent to 90 percent below 1990 levels by 2050 we will cross critical tipping points and global warming will accelerate beyond any human power to contain it. Yet despite all the ringing alarm bells, no corporation and no government can oppose growth. Instead, every capitalist government in the world is putting pedal to the metal to accelerate growth, to drive us full throttle off the cliff to collapse. Marxists have never had a better argument against capitalism than this inescapable and apocalyptic "contradiction."

2. SOLUTIONS TO THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS ARE BLINDINGLY OBVIOUS, BUT WE CAN'T TAKE THE NECESSARY STEPS TO PREVENT ECOLOGICAL COLLAPSE BECAUSE, SO LONG AS WE LIVE UNDER CAPITALISM, ECONOMIC GROWTH HAS TO TAKE PRIORITY OVER ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS OR THE ECONOMY WILL COLLAPSE AND MASS UNEMPLOYMENT WILL BE THE RESULT

We all know what we have to do: suppress greenhouse gas emissions. Stop overconsuming natural resources. Stop the senseless pollution of the Earth, its waters and its atmosphere with toxic chemicals. Stop producing waste that can't be recycled by nature. Stop the destruction of biological diversity and ensure the rights of other species to flourish. We don't need any new technological breakthroughs to solve these problems. Mostly, we just stop doing what we're doing. But we can't stop because we're all locked into an economic system in which companies have to grow to compete and reward their shareholders and because we all need the jobs.

Take Climate Change ...



James Hansen, the world's pre-eminent climate scientist, has argued that to save the humans, "Coal emissions must be phased out as rapidly as possible, or global climate disasters will be a dead certainty. ... Yes, [coal, oil, gas] most of the fossil fuels must be left in the ground. That is the explicit message that the science provides."

*Humanity treads today on a slippery slope. As we continue to pump greenhouse gases in the air, we move onto a steeper, even more slippery incline. We seem oblivious to the danger – unaware of how close we may be to a situation in which a catastrophic slip becomes practically unavoidable, a slip where we suddenly lose all control and are pulled into a torrential stream that hurls us over a precipice to our demise. [7]*

But how can we do this under capitalism? After his climate negotiators stonewalled calls for binding limits on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at Copenhagen, Cancun, Cape Town and Doha, President Obama is now trying to salvage his environmental "legacy" by ordering his EPA to impose "tough" new emissions limits on existing power plants, especially coal-fired plants.[8] But this won't salvage his legacy or, more importantly, his daughters' future. How much difference would it make, really, if every coal-fired power plant in the United States were to shut down tomorrow when US coal producers are free to export their coal to China, which they are doing, and when China is building another coal-fired power plant every week? The atmosphere doesn't care where the coal is burned. It only cares how much is burned. Yet how could Obama tell American mining companies to stop mining coal? This would be tantamount to socialism. But if we do not stop mining and burning coal, capitalist freedom and private property is the least we'll have to worry about.

Same with Obama's "tough" new fuel-economy standards. In August 2012, Obama boasted that his new corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standards would "double fuel efficiency" in the next 13 years to 54.5 mpg by 2025, up from 28.6 mpg at present – cutting vehicle CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in half, so helping enormously to "save the planet." But as the Center for Biological Diversity and other critics have noted, Obama was lying as usual. First, his so-called "tough" new CAFE standards were so full of loopholes, negotiated with Detroit, that

they actually encourage more gas guzzling, not less.[9] That's because the standards are based on a sliding scale according to "vehicle footprints" - the bigger the car, the less mileage it has to get to meet its standard. So, in fact, Obama's "tough" standards are (surprise) custom-designed to promote what Detroit does best - produce giant Sequoias, mountainous Denalis, Sierras, Yukons, Tundras and Ticonderogas, Ram Chargers and Ford F series luxury trucks, grossly obese Cadillac Escalades, soccer kid hauler Suburbans, even 8,000-pound Ford Excursions and let these gross gas hogs meet the "fleet standard." Many of these ridiculously oversized and overaccessorized behemoths are more than twice the weight of cars and pickup trucks in the 1950s.[10] These cars and "light" trucks are among the biggest-selling vehicles in America today (GM's Sierra is No. 1), and they get worse gas mileage than American cars and trucks half a century ago. Cadillac's current Escalade gets worse mileage than its chrome-bedecked tailfin-festooned land yachts of the mid-1950s![11] Little wonder Detroit applauded Obama's new CAFE standards instead of damning them. Secondly, what would it matter even if Obama's new CAFE standards actually did double fleet mileage - when American and global vehicle fleets are growing exponentially? In 1950 Americans had one car for every three people. Today we have 1.2 cars for every American. In 1950 when there were about 2.6 billion humans on the planet, there were 53 million cars on the world's roads - about one for every 50 persons. Today, there are 7 billion people but more than 1 billion cars. And industry forecasters expect there will be 2 billion to 2.5 billion cars on the world's roads by midcentury. China is expected to have 1 billion.[12] So, at the end of the day, incremental half-measures like CAFE standards can't stop rising GHG emissions. Barring some technical miracle, the only way to cut vehicle emissions is to just stop making them - drastically suppress vehicle production, especially of the worst gas hogs. In theory, Obama could at least simply order GM to stop building its humongous gas guzzlers and switch to producing small economy cars. After all, the federal government owns the company! But of course, how could he do any such thing? Detroit lives by the mantra "big car big profit, small car small profit." Since Detroit has never been able to compete against the Japanese and Germans in the small-car market, which already is glutted and nearly profitless everywhere, such an order would only doom GM to failure, if not bankruptcy (again), throw masses of workers onto the unemployment lines (and devalue the GM stock in the feds' portfolio). So given capitalism, Obama is, in fact, powerless. He's locked in to promoting the endless growth of vehicle production, even of the worst polluters - and lying about it all to the public to try to patch up his pathetic "legacy." And yet, if we don't suppress vehicle production, how can we stop rising CO2 emissions?

In the wake of the failure of climate negotiators from Kyoto to Doha to agree on binding limits on GHG emissions, exasperated British climate scientists Kevin Anderson and Alice Bows at the Tyndall Centre, Britain's leading climate change research center, wrote in September 2012 that we need an entirely "new paradigm": government policies must "radically change" if "dangerous" climate change is to be avoided:

*We urgently need to acknowledge that the development needs of many countries leave the rich western nations with little choice but to immediately and severely curb their greenhouse gas emissions. ... [The] misguided belief that commitments to avoid warming of 2 degrees C can still be realized with incremental adjustments to economic incentives. A carbon tax here, a little emissions trading there and the odd voluntary agreement thrown in for good measure will not be sufficient. ... Long-term end-point targets (for example, 80% by 2050) have no scientific basis. What governs future global temperatures and other adverse climate impacts are the emissions from yesterday, today, and those released in the next few years.[13]*

And not just scientists. In its latest world energy forecast released on November 12, 2012, the International Energy Agency (IEA) warns that despite the bonanza of fossil fuels now made possible by fracking, horizontal and deepwater drilling, we can't consume them if we want to save the humans: "The climate goal of limiting global warming to 2 degrees Centigrade is becoming more difficult and costly with each year that passes. ... No more that one-third of proven reserves of fossil fuels can be consumed prior to 2050 if the world is to achieve the 2 degree C goal. ... " [14] Of course the science could be wrong about this. But so far climate scientists have consistently underestimated the speed and ferocity of global warming, and even prominent climate change deniers have folded their cards.[15]

### Emergency Contraction or Global Ecological Collapse

Still, it's one thing for James Hansen or Bill McKibben of 350.org to say we need to "leave the coal in the hole, the oil in the soil, the gas under the grass," to call for "severe curbs" in GHG emissions – in the abstract. But think about what this means in our capitalist economy. Most of us, even passionate environmental activists, don't really want to face up to the economic implications of the science we defend. That's why, if you listen to

environmentalists such as Bill McKibben or Al Gore, for example, you will get the impression that global warming is mainly driven by fossil-fuel-powered electric power plants, so if we just “switch to renewables” this will solve the main problem and we can carry on with life more or less as we do now. Indeed, “green capitalism” enthusiasts like Thomas Friedman and the union-backed “green jobs” lobby look to renewable energy, electric cars and such as “the next great engine of industrial growth” – the perfect win-win solution. This is a not a solution. This is a delusion, because greenhouse gasses are produced across the economy, not just by or even mainly by power plants. Globally, fossil-fuel-powered electricity generation accounts for 17 percent of GHG emissions, heating accounts for 5 percent, miscellaneous “other” fuel combustion 8.6 percent, industry 14.7 percent, industrial processes another 4.3 percent, transportation 14.3 percent, agriculture 13.6 percent, land-use changes (mainly deforestation) 12.2 percent.[16] This means, for a start, that even if we immediately replaced every fossil-fuel-powered electricity-generating plant on the planet with 100 percent renewable solar, wind and water power, this would reduce global GHG emissions only by around 17 percent. What this means is that, far from launching a new green-energy-powered “industrial growth” boom, barring some tech-fix miracle, the only way to impose “immediate and severe curbs” on fossil fuel production and consumption would be to impose an emergency contraction in the industrialized countries: drastically retrench and in some cases shut down industries, even entire sectors, across the economy and around the planet – not just fossil-fuel producers, but all the industries that consume them and produce GHG emissions – autos, trucking, aircraft, airlines, shipping and cruise lines, construction, chemicals, plastics, synthetic fabrics, cosmetics, synthetic fiber and fabrics, synthetic fertilizer and agribusiness CAFO operations, and many more. Of course, no one wants to hear this because, given capitalism, this would unavoidably mean mass bankruptcies, global economic collapse, depression and mass unemployment around the world. That’s why in April 2013, in laying the political groundwork for his approval of the XL pipeline in some form, President Obama said “The politics of this are tough.” The Earth’s temperature probably isn’t the “number one concern” for workers who haven’t seen a raise in a decade, have an underwater mortgage, are spending \$40 to fill their gas tank, can’t afford a hybrid car and face other challenges.”[17] Obama wants to save the planet. But given capitalism, his “number one concern” has to be growing the economy, growing jobs. Given capitalism, today, tomorrow, next year and every year, economic growth will always be the overriding priority – until we barrel right off the cliff to collapse.

### The Necessity of Denial and Delusion

There’s no technical solution to this problem and no market solution either. In a very few cases – electricity generation is the main one – a broad shift to renewables could indeed sharply reduce fossil-fuel emissions in that sector. But if we just use “clean” “green” energy to power more growth, consume ever more natural resources to produce more and more junk we don’t need, then we would solve nothing and still would be headed to collapse.

Agriculture is another sector in which reliance on fossil fuels could be sharply reduced – by abandoning synthetic fertilizers and pesticides and switching to organic farming. And there's no downside there – just the resistance of the agribusiness industrial complex. But for the rest of the economy – mining, manufacturing, transportation, chemicals, most services (including construction, tourism, advertising, etc.), there are no such easy substitutes. Take transportation. There are no solar-powered ships or airplanes or trains on anyone's drawing boards. Producing millions of electric cars instead of millions of gasoline-powered cars, as I explained elsewhere, would be just as ecologically destructive and polluting, if in somewhat different ways, even if they were all run on solar power.[18] Substituting biofuels for fossil fuels in transportation just creates different but no less environmentally destructive problems: Converting farmland to raise biofuel feedstock pits food production against fuels. Converting rainforests, peatlands, savannas or grasslands to produce biofuels releases more CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere than the fossil fuels they replace and accelerates species extinction.[19] More industrial farming means more demand for water, synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. And so on. Cap-and-trade schemes can't cut fossil fuel emissions because, as I explained elsewhere,[20] business understands, even if some environmentalists do not, that "dematerialization" is a fantasy, that there's no win-win tech solution, that capping emissions means cutting growth. Since cutting growth is unacceptable to business, labor and governments, cap-and-trade has been abandoned everywhere.[21] Carbon taxes can't stop global warming either because they do not cap emissions. That's why fossil fuel execs like Rex Tillerson, CEO of ExxonMobil (the largest private oil company in the world) and Paul Anderson, CEO of Duke Energy (the largest electric utility in the United States), support carbon taxes. They understand that carbon taxes would add something to the cost of doing business, like other taxes, but they pose no limit, no "cap" on growth.[22] Exxon predicts that, carbon tax or no carbon tax, by 2040 global demand for energy is going to grow by 35 percent to 65 percent in the developing world and nearly all of this is going to be supplied by fossil fuels. ExxonMobil is not looking to "leave the oil in the soil" as a favor to Bill McKibben and the humans. ExxonMobil is looking to pump it and burn it all as fast as possible to enrich its shareholders. [23]

James Hansen, Bill McKibben, Barack Obama and most of us, really, don't want to face up to the economic implications of the need to put the brakes on growth and fossil-fuel-based overconsumption. We all "need" to live in denial and believe in delusions that carbon taxes or some tech fix will save us because we all know that capitalism has to grow or we'll all be out of work. And the thought of replacing capitalism seems so impossible, especially given the powers arrayed against change. But what's the alternative? In the not-so-distant future, this is all going to come to a screeching halt one way or another – either we seize hold of this out-of-control locomotive and wrench down this overproduction of fossil fuels, or we ride this train right off the cliff to collapse.

Same with Resource Depletion

We in the industrialized “consumer economies” are not just overconsuming fossil fuels. We’re overconsuming everything. From fish to forests, minerals to metals, oil to fresh water, we’re consuming the planet like there’s no tomorrow.[24] Ecological “footprint” scientists tell us that we in the industrialized nations are now consuming resources and sinks at the rate of 1.5 planets per year. That is, we’re using natural resources like fish, forests, water, farmland and so on at half-again the rate that nature can replenish them.[25] According to the World Bank, the wealthiest 10 percent of the world’s people accounts for almost 60 percent of consumption expenditures and the top 20 percent accounts for more than 76 percent of global consumption, whereas the bottom 40 percent of the world’s population account for just 5 percent. Even the bottom 70 percent of the world’s population accounts for barely 15.3 percent of global consumption expenditures.[26] Needless to say, the 70 percent wants and deserves a higher material standard of living. Yet if the whole world were to achieve this by consuming like Americans, we would need something like five more planets of natural resources and sinks for all of that.[27] Think what this means.

Take the case of China. Columbia University’s Earth Policy Institute predicts that if China keeps growing by around 8 percent per year, its current rate, Chinese average per capita consumption will reach current US level by around 2035. But to provide the natural resources for China’s 1.3 billion-plus to consume like America’s 330 million, the Chinese, roughly 20 percent of the world’s population, will consume as much oil as the entire world consumes today. They also will consume 69 percent of current world grain production, 62 percent of the current world meat production, 63 percent of current world coal consumption, 35 percent of current world steel consumption, 84 percent of current world paper consumption. (See Table 1.) Well, where on earth are the Chinese going to find the resources (not to mention sinks) to support all this consumption? China certainly doesn’t have the resources. That’s why the Chinese are buying up the planet. And that’s just China. What about the other four-fifths of humanity? What are they going to consume in 2035?



Already, as resource analyst Michael Klare reviews in his latest book, *The Race for What’s Left*, around the world existing reserves of oil, minerals and other resources “are being depleted at a terrifying pace and will be largely exhausted in the not-too-distant future.” This is driving miners and drillers to the ends of the earth, the bottom of oceans, to the arctic. We’re running out of planet to plunder so fast that serious people like Google’s Larry Page and Eric Schmidt have partnered with film director James Cameron to make life imitate art, to explore the possibility of mining asteroids and near planets. *Avatar* – the perfect capitalist solution to resource exhaustion (but the Marines will be Chinese). [28]

### China’s Capitalist Environmental Nightmare

As Beijing has been choking on smog this year, Deutsche Bank analysts gloomily conclude



that, barring extreme reforms, Chinese coal consumption and increased car ownership will push **pollution** levels 70 percent higher by 2025. They say that even if China's economy slowed to 5 percent growth per year, its annual coal consumption still would rise to 6 billion tons by 2022, from the current 3.8 billion tons. Car ownership is expected to increase over the years to 400 million in 2030 from the current 90 million. For China to meet its goal of reducing PM2.5 particulate matter to 35 micrograms of per cubic meter by 2030, the government would have to take drastic steps – shut down large numbers of coal-fired power plants, sharply reduce the number of vehicles on the roads, and shut down many other polluting industries.



Even then, air pollution would still be above the level deemed safe by the World Health Organization (25 micrograms of PM2.5 particulates per cubic meter). The current national average is 75 micrograms per cubic meter. In January, PM2.5 levels in Beijing reached 900 micrograms per cubic meter.[29] But here again, the problem is that ever since China turned onto the “capitalist road” and made its economy and employment ever-more dependent upon market success like the Western capitalist economies Deng Xiaoping sought to emulate, it can no more subordinate growth to the environment than can Barack Obama or ExxonMobil. Instead, China's commie capitalists, like regular capitalists everywhere, have no choice but to put the pedal to the metal, do all they can to accelerate humanity's collective drive to suicide.[30]

### “Wild facts” and Unquestioned Assumptions

In mainstream discourse it is taken as an absolutely unquestioned given by scientists like James Hansen, environmentalists like George Monbiot, not to mention CEOs and presidents, that demand for everything must grow infinitely, that economies must grow forever. That's why Hansen, Monbiot, James Lovelock and others tell us that, Fukushima notwithstanding, we “have to” go nuclear for energy production. In their view, the human population is headed for 9 billion to 10 billion. All these billions want to consume like Americans, so we will need more power for their washing machines, air conditioners, iPads, TVs and (electric) SUVs. We can't burn more fossil fuels to produce this power because it will cook the planet. Renewables are great but can't reliably meet relentlessly growing “base load” demand for electricity 24/7. Therefore, they tell us, we have no choice but to turn to nuclear power. (Besides, what could go wrong with the “newest,” “safest,” “fourth generation” reactors? What indeed?)[31]

But not one of these people stops to ask the obvious question: Where are all the resources going to come from to support insatiable consumption on a global scale? In the capitalist lexicon, there is no concept of “too much.” The word *overconsumption* cannot be found in Econ. 101 text books except as a temporary market aberration, soon to be erased as

“perfect competition” matches supply to demand and shortages and surpluses vanish down the gullet of the consumer. The fact that we live on one small planet with finite resources and sinks is just beyond the capitalist imagination because, as Herman Daly used to say, the “wild facts” of environmental reality demolish their underlying premise of the viability of endless growth on a finite planet. So inconvenient facts must be denied, suppressed or ignored. And they are. When, on May 10, 2013, climate scientists announced the latest “wild fact” that the level of heat-trapping CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the atmosphere had passed the long-feared milestone of 400 ppm, an event fraught with ominous consequences for us all, this was met with total silence from the world’s economic and political elites. President Obama was busy preparing his own announcement – that he was clearing the way for accelerated natural-gas exports by approving a huge new \$10 billion Freeport LNG facility in Texas. Obama’s Department of Energy gave Freeport LNG the green light because it “found the prospective benefits from exporting energy outweighed concerns about possible downsides.” No surprise there. Freeport LNG chief Michael Smith wasn’t anticipating downsides or any change in Obama’s priorities. He said: “I hope this means that more facilities will get approval in due time, sooner than later. The country needs these exports for jobs, for trade and for geopolitical reasons. ... “[32] That’s why, even though, at some repressed level, most Americans understand that fracking the planet is disastrous, even suicidal for their own children in the long run, yet still for the present they have to make the mortgage payments and fill the gas tank. So they have little choice but to live in denial and support fracking.[33] And so we go, down the slippery slope.

No one stops to ask “what’s it all for?” Why do we “need” all this energy? Why do we “need” all the stuff we produce with all this energy? It’s high time we start asking this question. Economists tell us that two-thirds of America’s own economy is geared to producing “consumer” goods and services. To be sure, we need food, clothing, housing, transportation, and energy to run all this. But as Vance Packard astutely observed half a century ago, most of what corporations produce today is produced not for the needs of people but for the needs of corporations to sell to people. From the ever-more obscene and pointless vanities of ruling class consumption – the Bentleys and Maseratis, the Bergdorf Goodman designer collections, the penthouses and resorts and estates and yachts and jets, to the endless waste stream of designed-in obsolescence-driven mass market fashions, cosmetics, furniture, cars, “consumer electronics,” the obese 1000 calorie Big Macs with fries, the obese and overaccessorized SUVs and “light trucks,” the obese and ever-growing McMansions for ever-smaller middle class families, the whole-house central air conditioning, flat screen TVs in every room, iThings in every hand, H&M disposable “fast fashion” too cheap to bother to clean, [34] the frivolous and astonishingly polluting jet and cruise ship vacations everywhere (even Nation magazine cruises with Naomi Klein!), and all the retail malls, office complexes, the packaging, shipping industries, the junk mail/magazine/catalog sales companies, the advertising, banking and credit card “industries” that keep this perpetual consumption machine humming along, not to mention the appalling waste of the arms industry, which is



just total deliberate waste and destruction, the vast majority – I would guess at least three quarters of all the goods and services we produce today just do not need to be produced at all. It's all just a resource-hogging, polluting waste. My parents lived passably comfortable working class lives in the 1940s and 50s without half this stuff and they weren't living in caves. We could all live happier, better, more meaningful lives without all this junk — and we do not need ever-more energy, solar or otherwise, to produce it. We could shut down all the coal-powered electric generators around the world, most of which, especially in China, are currently dedicated to powering the production of superfluous and disposable junk we don't need and replace them with — nothing. How's that for a sustainable solution? Same with nuclear. Since the 1960s, Japan built 54 nuclear power plants. But these were built not so much to provide electricity for the Japanese (their population is falling) as to power Japan's mighty manufacturing export engine producing all those disposable TVs and Gameboys and Toyotas and Hondas the world does not need and can no longer afford to consume.

Endless growth or repair, rebuild, upgrade, recycle?

So, for example, at the risk of sounding ridiculous, we don't really need a global automobile industry. At least we don't need an industry cranking out hundreds of millions of new cars every year, because the industry is built on the principle of designed-in obsolescence, on insatiable repetitive consumption, on advertising and "cash for clunkers" programs to push you to crush your perfectly good present car for a "new," "improved," "bigger," "more luxurious" model that is, in reality, trivially different, sometimes even inferior to the one you just junked. What we need is a different approach to transportation. To build a sustainable transportation system, we would have to divert most resources from auto production to public transportation, trains, buses and bicycling. But, of course, bikes and public transport aren't feasible everywhere and for every task, particularly for those who live in the suburbs or the country or in the mostly rural developing world. So we would still need some cars and trucks – but many fewer if we "degrow" the economy to produce just what we need instead of for profit. As the VW ads below point out, properly designed and engineered cars can be sturdy but simple, economical to drive, easily serviceable and repairable (even DIY), perpetually rebuildable and upgradable as needed. I'm not suggesting an ecosocialist society should produce this particular "peoples' car." We need something with modern safety features. But to the extent that we would need cars in a sustainable society, we could save immense resources and GHG emissions by producing massively fewer cars and keep them running for decades, if not practically forever. Reducing global car production to something like, say 10 percent of current production – and sharing those – would not only save vast resources and eliminate massive pollution but also free up labor and resources for other uses. Let us shorten the working day – and take longer vacations.

The same goes for all kinds of industries.

Apple easily could build you iPhones and iMacs, in classic timeless designs that could last for decades, that could be upgraded easily. This would save mountains of resources, not to mention the lives of Congolese kids and Foxconn assembly workers. But how much profit is there in that? Apple could never justify such a humane and environmentally rational approach to its shareholders because shareholders (who are several stages removed from the “sourcing” process and don’t really care to know about it) are capitalists rationally looking to maximize returns on their portfolios, not to maximize the lifespan of the company’s products, let alone the lifespan of Congolese or Chinese. So to this end, you have to be convinced that your G4 phone is not good enough, that you “need” an iPhone5 because you need a phone that streams movies, that talks to you and more, and next year you will need an iPhone6. And even if you own an iPad3 you will soon “need” an iPad4, plus an iPad Mini, and how will you live without iTV? This incessant, exponentially growing demand for the latest model of disposable electronic gadgets is destroying societies and the environment from Congo to China and beyond.

*Miners near village of Kobu in northeastern Congo. Picture credit: Finbarr O’Reilly/Reuters, in The New York Times, March 20, 2012.*

IKEA easily could manufacture beautifully designed, high-quality, sturdy and durable furniture that could last a lifetime, that could be handed down to your children or passed on friends or antique shops for others. That would save a Siberia’s worth of trees, lakes of toxic dyes and finishes, and vast quantities of other resources. But why would it do that? IKEA is not in business to make furniture or save the planet. IKEA is in the business to make money. As Ingvar Kamprad, founder and CEO of IKEA (and Nazi symp), long ago discovered, the way to maximize profits (besides employing semi-slave forced prison labor in Stalinist regimes and moving his “Swedish” company from high-tax Sweden to low-tax Holland and Switzerland)[35] is to relentlessly cheapen production by, among other tactics, building flat-pack disposable particle-board furniture in accordance with the Iron Law of Marketing to sell “the cheapest construction for the briefest interval the buying public will tolerate” so IKEA can chop down more Siberian birch trees and sell you the same shoddy \$59 bookcase all over again that will last you as long as the first one did – perhaps a bit longer this time if you don’t actually load many books of those flimsy shelves. As an IKEA commercial, directed by Spike Jonze, tells us: “an old lamp (or bookcase or table) doesn’t have any feelings; any piece of furniture can and should be replaced at any time.” The ad, and the whole IKEA approach, suggests that objects have no lasting meaning or value. They’re disposable; when we tire of them, we should just throw them out.[36] This is how IKEA got to be the third-largest consumer of wood in the world, most of it from East Europe and the Russian Siberia, where, according to the World Bank, half of all logging is illegal even by the Russian kleptocracy’s standards of legality. IKEA’s wholly owned Swedish subsidiary Swedwood has even been condemned by Russian nature conservancy organizations and the Global Forest Coalition for clear-cutting 1,400 acres a year of 200- to 600-year-old forest near the Finnish

border, a process that “is having deep ramifications on invaluable forest ecosystems.”[37] This is how IKEA’s business plan based on endless “repetitive consumption” is wiping out life on Earth. Here again, the capitalist freedom to make such junk wouldn’t matter – if it weren’t costing the Earth.[38]

Given capitalism, there’s no way to “incentivize” GM to stop producing new cars every year, IKEA to stop making its disposable furniture, Apple to stop pushing you to lose your iPhone 4 and buy a 5. That’s what they’re invested in. Companies can’t change, or change much, because it’s too costly, too risky, shareholders won’t allow it. And given capitalism, most workers, most of the time, have no choice but to support all this suicidal overconsumption because if we all stop shopping to save the planet today, we’d all be out of work tomorrow. Ask your nearest 6-year-old what’s wrong with this picture.

### Capitalism and Délastage in the Richest Country of Poor People in the World

Yet even as corporations are plundering the planet to overproduce stuff we don’t need, huge social, economic and ecological needs – housing, schools, infrastructure, health care, environmental remediation – go unmet, even in the industrialized world, while most of Third World lacks even basic sanitation, clean water, schools, health care, ecological restoration, not to mention jobs.[39] After 300 years of capitalist “development” the gap between rich and poor has never been wider: Today, almost half the world, more than 3 billion people, live on less than \$2.50 a day, 80 percent of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day. This while the world’s richest 1% own 40 percent of the world’s wealth. The richest 10 percent own 85 percent of total global assets, and half the world barely owns 1 percent of global wealth. And these gaps have only widened over time.[40] Tell me again where Karl Marx was wrong? In Congo is one of the lushest, most fertile countries on the planet, with untold natural wealth in minerals, lumber, tropical crops and more. Yet its resources are plundered every day to support gross overconsumption in the north while poverty, hunger and malnutrition are so widespread that Congo is now listed dead last on the 2011 Global Hunger Index, a measure of malnutrition and child nutrition compiled by the International Food Policy Research Institute. While European and American corporations loot its copper and cobalt and coltran for iPhones and such, half the population eats only once a day and a quarter less than that. Things have reached such a state that in places like the capital Kinshasha parents can afford to feed their children only every other day. Congolese call it “délastage” – an ironic takeoff on the rolling electrical blackouts that routinely hit first one neighborhood then the next. In this context it means “Today we eat! Tomorrow we don’t.”

“On some days,” one citizen told a *New York Times* reporter, “some children eat, others do not. On other days, all the children eat, and the adults do not. Or vice versa.” [41] This, in the 21st century, in one of the resource-richest countries on Earth, and brought to them by an economic system that capitalist economists never tire of telling us is “the best system

humanity can come up with.”

## Contraction or Collapse

If there's no market mechanism to stop plundering the planet, then, again, what alternative is there but to impose an emergency contraction on resource consumption? This doesn't mean we would have to de-industrialize and go back to riding horses and living in log cabins. But it does mean that we would have to abandon the “consumer economy” - shut down all kinds of unnecessary, wasteful and polluting industries from junk food to cruise ships, disposable Pampers to disposable H&M clothes, disposable IKEA furniture, endless new model cars, phones, electronic games, the lot. Plus all the banking, advertising, junk mail, most retail, etc. We would have to completely redesign production to replace “fast junk food” with healthy, nutritious, fresh “slow food,” replace “fast fashion” with “slow fashion,” bring back mending, alterations and local tailors and shoe repairmen. We would have to completely redesign production of appliances, electronics, housewares, furniture and so on to be as durable and long-lived as possible. Bring back appliance repairmen and such. We would have to abolish the throwaway disposables industries, the packaging and plastic bag industrial complex, bring back refillable bottles and the like. We would have to design and build housing to last for centuries, to be as energy-efficient as possible, to be reconfigurable and shareable. We would have to vastly expand public transportation to curb vehicle use but also build those we do need to last and be shareable like Zipcar or Paris' municipally owned “Autolib” shared electric cars. These are the sorts of things we would have to do to if we really want to stop overconsumption and save the world. All these changes are simple, self-evident, no great technical challenge. They just require a completely different kind of economy, an economy geared to producing what we need while conserving resources for future generations of humans and for other species with which we share this planet.

## 3. IF CAPITALISM CAN'T HELP BUT DESTROY THE WORLD, THEN WHAT ALTERNATIVE IS THERE BUT TO NATIONALIZE AND SOCIALIZE MOST OF THE ECONOMY AND PLAN IT DIRECTLY, EVEN PLAN MOST OF THE GLOBAL INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY?

With 7 billion humans crowded on one small planet running out of resources, with cities disappearing under vast clouds of pollution, with the glaciers and ice caps melting and species going extinct by the hour, we desperately need a PLAN to avert ecological collapse. We need a comprehensive global plan, a number of national or regional plans, and a multitude of local plans - and we need to coordinate them all. When climate scientists call on governments to cut CO2 emissions to stay within a global “carbon budget” if we want to keep a livable planet, isn't that, in effect, calling for “planning,” indeed, planning on a global scale? When governments pump money into research projects like nuclear power or biotech or the Internet or clean energy projects, isn't that planning? When scientists say that we need to massively reduce and limit consumption of oil, coal, trees, fish, all kinds of scarce

resources or stop dumping chemicals in the world's oceans – isn't that, in effect, physical planning and rationing? And don't we want that? Indeed, because we all breathe the same air, live in the same biosphere, don't we really want and need something like a "one-world government" at least on environmental issues? How else can we regulate humanity's collective impact on the global biosphere? How else can we reorganize and reprioritize the economy in the common interest and environmental rationality except in a mostly planned and mostly publicly owned economy?

What Would We Have To Do To Save the Humans?

If we want a sustainable economy, one that "meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs," then we would have to do at least some or all of the following:

1. Put the brakes on out-of-control growth in the global North
  - retrench or shut down unnecessary, resource-hogging, wasteful, polluting industries like fossil fuels, autos, aircraft and airlines, shipping, chemicals, bottled water, processed foods, unnecessary pharmaceuticals and so on. Abolish luxury-goods production, the fashions, jewelry, handbags, mansions, Bentleys, yachts, private jets etc. Abolish the manufacture of disposable, throw-away and "repetitive consumption" products. All these consume resources we're running out of, resources that other people on the planet desperately need and that our children and theirs will need.

2. Discontinue harmful industrial processes like industrial agriculture, industrial fishing, logging, mining and so on.

3. Close many services – the banking industry, Wall Street, the credit card, retail, PR and advertising “industries” built to underwrite and promote all this overconsumption. I’m sure most of the people working in these so-called industries would rather be doing something else, something useful, creative and interesting and personally rewarding with their lives. They deserve that chance.

4. Abolish the military-surveillance-police state industrial complex, and all its manufactures because this is just a total waste whose only purpose is global domination, terrorism and destruction abroad and repression at home. We can’t build decent societies anywhere when so much of social surplus is squandered on such waste.

5. Reorganize, restructure, reprioritize production and build the products we do need to be as durable and shareable as possible.

6. Steer investments into things society does need, like renewable energy, organic farming, public transportation, public water systems, ecological remediation, public health, quality schools and other currently unmet needs.

7. Deglobalize trade to produce what can be produced locally; trade what can't be produced locally, to reduce transportation pollution and revive local producers.

8. Equalize development the world over by shifting resources out of useless and harmful production in the North and into developing the South, building basic infrastructure,

sanitation systems, public schools, health care, and so on.

9. Devise a rational approach to eliminate or control waste and toxins as much as possible.

10. Provide equivalent jobs for workers displaced by the retrenchment or closure of unnecessary or harmful industries, not just the unemployment line, not just because workers cannot support the industry we and they need to save ourselves.

“Necessary,” “Unnecessary” and Who’s the “Decider”?

Now we might all agree that we have to cut “overconsumption” to save the humans. But who’s to say what’s “necessary” and “unnecessary?” How do we decide what to cut? And who’s to decide? Under capitalism goods and services are rationed by the market. But that’s not sustainable because the market can’t restrain consumption, the market can only accelerate consumption. So we need a non-market approach. I don’t claim to have all the answers. This is a big question and I’m sure there are others better qualified than me to figure out solutions. But I would think the short answer has to be a combination of planning, rationing and democracy. I don’t see why that’s so hard. The US government planned significant parts of the US economy during World War II and rationed many goods and services. And we managed just fine. Actually, far from suffering unduly, Americans took pride in conservation and sharing. Besides, what’s the alternative? What other choice do we



have? There are only so many ways to organize a modern industrial economy.

The challenges of physically planning the world economy in the interests of the 99% instead of for the 1% - reorganizing and reprioritizing the world economy to provide every person sufficient, nutritious, safe and delicious food, providing every human with high-quality, pleasurable, and aesthetically appealing housing, consolidating our cities to maximize the feasibility of public transportation, building great schools to enable every student to reach her or his fullest potential, providing top-notch health care for everyone on the planet, reorganizing and reprioritizing work so that everyone can find constructive, enjoyable, interesting, challenging and rewarding work, work that's rewarding in many ways beyond simple remuneration, providing fun, enlightening and inspiring entertainment, reducing the workday so people can actually have time to enjoy themselves and pursue other pleasures, while, not least, how to limit our collective human impact on the planet so as to leave space and resources to all the other wonderful life forms with which we have the pleasure of sharing this unique and amazing planet - all these are no doubt big challenges. They're very big political challenges. But they're not an economic challenge. This is not Soviet Russia in 1917. I'm not proposing Maoist austerity. Today, there's more than enough wealth and productive capacity to provide every person on earth a very satisfactory material standard of living. Even more than half a century ago, Gandhi was right to say then that "there's more than enough wealth for man's need but never enough for some men's greed." I doubt that it would even be much of a technical challenge. Google's Larry Page predicts that the virtually everyone in the world will have access to the Internet by 2020. Quantifying human needs, global resources and global agricultural and industrial capacities is, I would think, a fairly pedestrian task for today's computers, with all their algorithms.

### Planning Can't Work?

Right-wing economists like Milton Friedman denied the very possibility of planning any economy, equating all planning with Stalinism. I don't buy that. The question is this: Planning by whom, for whom? Stalinist central planning was planning from the top down, by and for a totalitarian bureaucracy. It completely shut out workers and the rest of society from the planning process. So it's hardly surprising that planning didn't work so well in the Soviet Union. But I don't see what that tells us about the potentials of planning from the bottom up, of democratic planning. Besides, capitalists indirectly plan the national and global economies all the time. They meet every year at Davos to shape the world market for their benefit. They conspire to privatize medicine, schools, public transportation, force us to buy "their" water or eat GMO foods. They use the IMF and World Bank to shackle countries with debt then open them up to U.S. corporate takeover. They've been using their states for centuries to expropriate peasants and tribes, even to exterminate them when necessary as in the Americas, to steal and privatize common lands, break up pre-capitalist societies, reorganize, replan whole continents to set up the right "business climate" for capital

accumulation. Late developers like Japan and South Korea used their state-backed MITIs and Chaebols to hothouse their own industries, protect them and strategically plan their integration into the world market. Capitalists are very good at planning – for their own interests. So why can't we plan the economy for our own interests?

### Government "Can't Pick Winners"?

Disengenuous capitalist apologists like the *Wall Street Journal* are quick to condemn any perceived government funded "failures" like the recent bankruptcy of solar startup Solyndra Corporation bankrolled by the Obama administration as proof that "government can't pick winners." But Solyndra didn't fail because solar is a losing technology. It failed because, ironically, capitalist Solyndra could not compete against lower-cost, state-owned, state-directed and state-subsidized competitors in China. Besides, since when do capitalists have a crystal ball? CEOs and corporate boards bet on "loser" technologies and products all the time. Look at the recent collapse of electric car startup Fisker Automotive, or Better Place, the Israeli electric vehicle charging/battery swapping stations venture.<sup>[42]</sup> These join a long list of misplaced private bets from Sony's Betamax to Polaroid, Ford's Edsel, Tucker Automobile, DeLorean Motor Company and all the way back to White Star Lines Titanic and the Tulip Mania. CEOs and boards not only pick losing technology and products, they also lose money for their shareholders and even drive perfectly successful companies into bankruptcy every day: Jamie Dimon at JPMorgan, Lehman Brothers, Washington Mutual, Enron, WorldCom, Pan Am, SwissAir and on and on. Who knows if Facebook or Zipcar or Tesla Motors will ever make money? Government-backed Solyndra lost \$500 million. But when Jamie Dimon lost \$12 billion for JPMorgan, I don't recall the *Journal* howling that capitalists "can't pick winners." When Enron collapsed I don't recall hearing any blanket condemnation of the "inevitable incompetence" of the private sector. Hypocrisy is stock and trade of capitalists, lazy media and fact-averse capitalist economists who want to make the facts fit their simple-minded model no matter the truth. That's why it's entirely in character that the *Wall Street Journal* has never bothered to applaud government when it picked indisputable winners: when government-funded, government-directed applied research produced nuclear weapons, nuclear energy, radar, rockets, the jet engine, the transistor, the microchip, the Internet, GPS, crucial breakthroughs in biotechnology, when government scientists and government industries launched the Apollo spacecrafts that put men on the moon, when government-developed and produced ballistic missiles terrorized the Soviets and government-designed and operated bombers bombed the Reds in Korea and Vietnam to "contain Communism" and secure American dominance of the Free World for corporate subscribers of the *Wall Street Journal* to exploit – where then was the *cri de coeur* that "government can't pick winners"? And what about those government-run drones? Anti-government bigmouth Rand Paul filibustered for a whole day against the threat of swarms of government drones over American cities but I didn't hear him complain that government drones don't work. That wasn't his problem. And when, after an eight-year, mind-bogglingly

difficult, complex and risky 150 million-mile journey, NASA's government-built Curiosity spaceship landed a (government-built) state-of-the art science lab the size of a Mini Cooper within a mile and a half of its target on the surface of Mars - then it immediately set off to explore its new neighborhood - even the Ayn Rand-loving government-hating Republicans in Congress were awed into silence. As David Sirota's headline in Salon.com read on August 13, 2012, just after Curiosity set down on the red planet: "Lesson from Mars: Government works!" And right now, as I'm writing this in April 2013, most of a year later, that government-run Mars explorer is happily roving around drilling core samples to find out if there is now, or used to be, water and possibly even life on Mars. All this while, back home, Shell Oil's private capitalist-run arctic drilling platform ran aground in an arctic storm and is now being towed away to Asia for repairs while Shell Oil's shareholders are having second thoughts about their CEO's wisdom in "picking winners" by squandering \$5 billion on this fools errand of drilling for oil under Arctic ice.[43]

### One Planet, One People, One Economy for the Common Good

For better or worse we are well into what scientists call the "Anthropocene." Nature doesn't run Earth anymore. We do. So if we are, after all, just "one people on one planet," it's time we begin to make conscious and collective decisions about how our economic activity affects the natural world - and I don't mean "geoengineering" the planet by wrapping glaciers in tinfoil to slow their melting while capitalism goes right on cooking and pillaging the planet. Since the rise of capitalism 300 years ago, more and more of the world has come to be run on the principle of market anarchy, on Adam Smith's maxim that every individual should just maximize his own interest - "look out for No. 1" - and the "public interest," the "common good" would take care of itself. Well, that hasn't worked out so well. It was always a dumb theory, but it's worked OK for the 1% who could mostly manage without the commons. For the rest of us, the more capitalism, the more the common good gets trashed. And now globalized market anarchy is destroying not just humanity and society but even life on Earth.[44] The problem with Smith's theory is that the aggregate of private interests don't add up to the public interest. The problems we face with respect to the planetary environment and ecology can't be solved by individual choice in the marketplace. They require collective democratic control over the economy to prioritize the needs of society, the environment, other species and future generations. This requires local, national and global economic planning to reorganize the world economy and redeploy labor and resources to these ends. And it requires an economy of guaranteed full employment because if we would have to shut down ExxonMobil and GM and Monsanto[45] and Walmart and so on to save the world, then we have to provide equal or better jobs for all those laid-off workers because otherwise they won't support what we all need to do to save ourselves.

### Ecosocialism and the Salvation of Small Businesses

This does not at all mean that we would have to nationalize local restaurants, family farms, farmers markets, artisans, groceries, bakeries, repair shops, workers co-ops and the like. Small-scale self-managed producers based on simple reproduction are not destroying the world. Large-scale capitalist investor-owned corporations based on insatiable accumulation are destroying the world. So they would have to be nationalized, many closed down, others scaled back, others repurposed. But an ecosocialist society would rescue and promote small-scale, local, self-managed businesses because we would need them. Indeed, we would want many more of them whereas, today, capitalism is driving them out of business everywhere.

#### 4. RATIONAL PLANNING REQUIRES DEMOCRACY: VOTING THE BIG QUESTIONS

Solar or coal? Frack the planet, or work our way off fossil fuels? Drench the world's farms in toxic pesticides or return to organic agriculture. Public transportation or private cars as the mainstay? Let's put the big questions up for a vote. Shouldn't everyone have a say in decisions that affect them all? Isn't that the essential idea of democracy? The problem with capitalism is that the economy isn't up for a vote. But it needs to be. Again, in Adam Smith's day it mattered less, at least for the environment, because private decisions had so little impact on the planet. But today, huge decisions that affect all of us, other species, and even the fate of life on Earth are all still private decisions, made by corporate boards on behalf of self-interested investors. Polls show that 57 percent of Chinese feel that protecting the environment should be given priority, even at the expense of economic growth, and only 21 percent prioritize the economy over the environment.<sup>[46]</sup> But, obviously, the Chinese don't get to vote on that or anything else. Polls show Americans opposed to GMO foods outnumber supporters nearly two to one and 82 percent of Americans favor labeling of GMO foods.<sup>[47]</sup> But Americans don't get to vote on whether we get GMOs in our food or get told about it. Well, why not? Corporate boards vote to put GMOs and all kinds of toxic chemicals in our food. We're the ones who consume this stuff. We can't avoid GMOs simply by refusing to purchase them - the "market solution" - because they're everywhere. They're in 80 percent of the foods we consume, and Monsanto and the rest of the GMO-industrial complex bribe politicians and regulators with campaign contributions and lucrative revolving-door jobs to make sure you don't know what foods to avoid.<sup>[48]</sup> Well, why should we accept this? Why shouldn't we have a say in these decisions? We don't have to be experts; corporate boards aren't composed of experts. They're mainly made up of major investors. They discuss and vote on what they want to do, then hire experts to figure out how to implement their decisions. Why can't we do that - for humanity's interests?

#### Every Cook Can Govern

From Tunisa to Tahir Square; Zuccotti Park to Gezi Park; Madison, Wisconsin, to Kunming Yunnan, Songjian Shanghai, Shifang Sichuan, Guangzhou and thousands of sites and cities and towns all over China, ordinary citizens demonstrate remarkably rational environmental

sense against the profit-driven environmental irrationality and irresponsibility of their rulers.[49] In Turkey, “Sultan” Erdogan’s decree to tear up Istanbul’s last major park to replace it with an Ottoman-style shopping mall provoked mass outrage. Protesters complained, as one put it: “When were we asked what we wanted? We have three times as many mosques as we do schools. Yet they are building new mosques. There are eight shopping malls in the vicinity of Taksim, yet they want to build another. ... Where are the opera houses? The theaters? The culture and youth centers? What about those? They only choose what will bring them the most profit without considering what we need.”[50] When, in a bid to mollify the protesters, a spokesman for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) floated the excellent idea of a public referendum on the issue saying, “We might put it to a referendum. ... In democracies only the will of the people counts,” Erdogan considered this option for a moment. But when protesters doubted his sincerity, he proved them right by calling in his riot squads to crush the protests instead.[51] In Brazil, on the heels of the Turkish protests, mass protests erupted over announced bus fare hikes but soon morphed into more sweeping social protest as hundreds of thousands of Brazilians turned out in cities across the country to denounce the irresponsible waste of public funds on extravagant soccer stadiums in the run-up to the World Cup in 2014, when schools, public transportation, hospitals, health care and other public services are neglected: “People are going hungry, and the government builds stadiums,” said Eleuntina Scuilaro, a pensioner. “I love soccer, but we need schools,” said Evaldir Cardoso, a fireman at a protest with his 7-month-old son. “These protests are in favor of common sense, argued protester Roberta da Matta. “We pay an absurd amount of taxes in Brazil, and now more people are questioning what they are getting in return.”[52]

If corporations and capitalist governments can’t align production with the common good and ecological rationality, what other choice is there but for society to collectively and democratically organize, plan and manage most production themselves? To do this we would have to establish democratic institutions to plan and manage our social economy. We would have to set up planning boards at local, regional, national/continental and international levels. Those would have to include not just workers, the direct producers, but entire communities, consumers, farmers, peasants, everyone. We have models: the Paris Commune, Russian soviets, Brazil’s participatory planning, La Via Campesina and others. Direct democracy at the base, delegated authority with right of recall for higher-level planning boards. What’s so difficult about that? [53]

As Greg Palast, Jarrold Oppenheim and Theo MacGregor described in *Democracy and Regulation: How the Public Can Govern Essential Services* (2003), it is a curious and ironic fact that the United States, foremost protagonist of the free market, possesses a large and indispensable sector of the economy that is not governed by the free market but instead, democratically, by public oversight – and that is utilities: the provision of electricity, heating fuel, water and sewerage, and local telephone service. Not only that but these are the most

efficient and cheapest utility systems in the world. The authors note that British residents pay 44 percent more for electricity than do American consumers, 85 percent more for local telephone service and 26 percent more for natural gas. Europeans pay even more, Latin Americans more than Europeans. They write that “Americans pay astonishingly little for high-quality public services, yet low charges do not suppress wages: American utility workers are the nation’s industrial elite, with a higher concentration of union membership than in any other private industry.” Palast, Oppenheim and MacGregor attribute this to the fact that, unlike Britain and most of the rest of the world, utilities are not unregulated free-market corporations like ExxonMobil or Monsanto or Rio Light or British Water. Instead, they are tightly regulated industries, mostly privately owned, but many publicly owned by local municipalities. Yet even when utilities are privately owned like Con Edison in New York or Green Mountain Power in Vermont or Florida Power and Light (to take some East Coast examples), it’s really hard to call this “capitalism.” It’s more like state capitalism, even quasi-socialism. Either way, public- or investor-owned, they are highly regulated, subject to public oversight, involvement and control:

Unique in the world (with the exception of Canada), every aspect of US regulation is wide open to the public. There are no secret meetings, no secret documents. Any and all citizens and groups are invited to take part: individuals, industrial customers, government agencies, consumer groups, trade unions, the utility itself, even its competitors. Everyone affected by the outcome has a right to make their case openly, to ask questions of government and utilities, to read all financial and operating records in detail. In public forums, with all information open to all citizens, the principles of social dialogue and transparency come to life. It is an extra-ordinary exercise in democracy – and it works. ... Another little-known fact is that, despite the recent experiments with markets in electricity [the authors published this book in 2003, just three years after the Enron privatization debacle], the US holds to the strictest, most elaborate and detailed system of regulation anywhere: Private utilities’ profits are capped, investments directed or vetoed by public agencies. Privately owned utilities are directed to reduce prices for the poor, fund environmentally friendly physical and financial inspection. ... Americans, while strongly attached to private property and ownership, demand stern and exacting government control over vital utility services.[54]

The authors are careful to note that this is “no regulatory Garden of Eden.” It has many failings: regulation is constantly under attack by promoters of market pricing, the public interest and the profit motive of investor-owned utilities often conflict with negative consequences for the public, and so on. [55] But even so, this long-established and indisputably successful example of democratic public regulation of large-scale industries offers us a real-world practical example of something like a “proto-socialism.” I see no obvious reason something like this model of democracy and transparency could not be extended, expanded, fully socialized and replicated to encompass the entire large-scale industrial economy. Of course, as I argued above, to save the humans, we would have to do

much more than just “regulate” industries. We would have to completely reorganize and reprioritize the whole economy, indeed the whole global industrial economy. This means not just regulating but retrenching and closing down resource-consuming and polluting industries, shifting resources out of them, starting up new industries and so on. Those are huge tasks, beyond the scope of even the biggest corporations, even many governments. So who else could do this but self-organized masses of citizens, the whole society acting in concert, democratically? Obviously, many issues can be decided at local levels. Others like closing down the coal industry or repurposing the auto industry, require large-scale planning at national if not international levels. Some, like global warming, ocean acidification, deforestation, would require extensive international coordination, virtually global planning. I don’t see why that’s not doable. We have the UN Climate Convention, which meets annually and is charged with regulating GHG emissions. It fails to do so only because it lacks enforcement powers. We need to give it enforcement powers.

## 5. DEMOCRACY CAN WORK ONLY IN CONTEXT OF ROUGH SOCIO-ECONOMIC EQUALITY AND SOCIAL GUARANTEES.

When in the midst of the Great Depression, the great “people’s jurist” Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis said, “We can either have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few. But we can’t have both.” He was more right than he knew. Today we have by far the greatest concentration of wealth in history. So it’s hardly surprising that we have the weakest and most corrupt democracies since the Gilded Age. If we want democracy, we would have to abolish “the great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few.” That means abolishing not just private property in the means of production, but also extremes of income, exorbitant salaries, great property, and inheritance. Because the only way to prevent corruption of democracy is to make it impossible to materially gain by doing so – by creating a society with neither rich nor poor, a society of basic economic equality.

Does that mean we would all have to dress in blue Mao suits and dine in communal mess halls? Hardly. Lots of studies (Wilkinson and Pickett’s Spirit Level, the UK’s New Economics Foundation studies, and others) have shown that people are happier, there’s less crime and violence and fewer mental health problems in societies where income differences are small and where concentrated wealth is limited. We don’t have five planets to provide the resources for the whole world to live the “American Dream” of endless consumerism. But we have more than enough wealth to provide every human being on the planet with a basic income, with a good job at pay sufficient to lead a dignified life, with safe water and sanitation, quality food, housing, education and health care, with public transportation – all the authentic necessities we really need. These should all be guaranteed as a matter of right, as indeed most of these already were declared as such in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.



Freeing ourselves from the toil of producing unnecessary or harmful commodities – the three-quarters of current US production that’s a waste – would free us to shorten the work day, to enjoy the leisure promised but never delivered by capitalism, to redefine the meaning of the standard of living to connote a way of life that is actually richer, while consuming less, to realize our fullest human potential instead of wasting our lives in mindless drudgery and shopping. This is the emancipatory promise of ecosocialism.[56]

## 6. THIS IS CRAZY, UTOPIAN, IMPOSSIBLE, NEVER HAPPEN

Perhaps. But what’s the alternative? The specter of planetwide ecological collapse and the collapse of civilization into some kind of *Blade Runner* dystopia is not as hypothetical as it once seemed. Ask the Chinese. China’s “capitalist miracle” already has driven that country off the cliff into headlong ecological collapse that threatens to take the whole planet down with it. With virtually all its rivers and lakes polluted and many depleted, with 70 percent of its croplands contaminated with heavy metals and other toxins, with undrinkable water, inedible food, unbreathable air that kills more than a million Chinese a year, with “cancer villages” metastasizing over the rural landscape and cancer the leading cause of death in Beijing,[57] China’s rulers face hundreds of mass protests, often violent, around the country every day, more than 100,000 protest a year. And even with all their police-state instruments of repression, they know they can’t keep the lid on forever (indeed, hundreds of thousands of Communist Party kleptocrats can see the writing on the wall through the smog and are moving their families, their money and themselves out of the country before it’s too late). Today the Chinese and we need a socialist revolution not just to abolish exploitation and alienation but to derail the capitalist train wreck of ecological collapse before it takes us all over the edge. As China itself demonstrates, revolutions come and go. Economic systems come and go. Capitalism has had a 300-year run. The question is, will humanity stand by let the world be destroyed to save the profit system?

### The Specter of Eco-Democratic Revolution

That outcome depends to a great extent on whether we, on the left, can answer that question – “What’s your alternative?” – with a compelling and plausible vision of an eco-socialist civilization – and figure out how to get there. We have our work cut out for us. But what gives the growing global eco-socialist movement an edge in this ideological struggle is that capitalism has no solution to the ecological crisis, no way to put the brakes on collapse, because its only answer to every problem is more of the same growth that’s killing us. “History” was supposed to have “ended” with the fall of communism and the triumph of capitalism two decades ago. Yet today, history is very much alive. And it is, ironically, capitalism itself that is being challenged more broadly than ever and found wanting for solutions. Today, we are very much living in one of those pivotal world-changing moments in history, indeed it is no exaggeration to say that this is the most critical moment in human



history. We may be fast approaching the precipice of ecological collapse, but the means to derail this train wreck are in the making as, around the world, struggles against the destruction of nature, against dams, against pollution, against overdevelopment, against the siting of chemical plants and power plants, against predatory resource extraction, against the imposition of GMOs, against privatization of remaining common lands, water and public services, against capitalist unemployment and *precarité* are growing and building momentum. Today we're riding a swelling wave of near-simultaneous global mass democratic "awakening," almost global mass uprising. This global insurrection is still in its infancy, still unsure of its future, but its radical democratic instincts are, I believe, humanity's last best hope. Let's make history!

The original version of this story appeared in the [Real World Economics Review](#).

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[1] Tom Bawden, "[Carbon dioxide in atmosphere at highest level for 5 million years](#)," *The Independent*, May 10, 2013 .

[2] Justin Gillis, "Heat-trapping gas passes milestone, raising fears," *The New York Times*, May 10, 2013. Scripps Institution of Oceanography, [Scripps News](#), April 23, 2013 .

[3] Michael T. Klare, *The Race for What's Left* (New York: Picador 2012), p. 24 Table 1.1. Jeffrey Sachs calculates that in value terms, between 1950 and 2008 the global human population rose from 2.5 billion to 7 billion, so less than tripled, while global GDP multiplied eight times. *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 19.

[4] On Shell's impact on Africa, see Nimo Bassey, *To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa* (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press 2012).

[5] Delly Mawazo Sesete of Change.org, writing in *The Guardian* newspaper says, "I am originally from the North Kivu province in the eastern region of the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), where a deadly conflict has been raging for over 15 years. While that conflict began as a war over ethnic tension, land rights and politics, it has increasingly turned to being a war of profit, with various armed groups fighting one another for control of strategic mineral reserves. Near the area where I grew up, there are mines with vast amounts of tungsten, tantalum, tin, and gold - minerals that make most consumer electronics in the world function. These minerals are part of your daily life. They keep your computer running so you can surf the Internet. They save your high score on your Playstation. They make your

cellphone vibrate when someone calls you. While minerals from the Congo have enriched your life, they have often brought violence, rape and instability to my home country. That's because those armed groups fighting for control of these mineral resources use murder, extortion and mass rape as a deliberate strategy to intimidate and control local populations, which helps them secure control of mines, trading routes and other strategic areas. Living in the Congo, I saw many of these atrocities firsthand. I documented the child slaves who are forced to work in the mines in dangerous conditions. I witnessed the deadly chemicals dumped into the local environment. I saw the use of rape as a weapon. And despite receiving multiple death threats for my work, I've continued to call for peace, development and dignity in Congo's minerals trade." "[Apple: time to make a conflict-free iPhone](#)," *The Guardian*, December 30, 2011. For more detail see [conflictminerals.org](http://conflictminerals.org). See also: Peter Eichstaedt, *Consuming the Congo: War and Conflict Minerals in the World's Deadliest Place* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 2011).

[6] Lauren McCauley, "[Herbicides for GMOs driving monarch butterfly populations to 'ominous' brink](#)," Common Dreams, March 14, 2013.

[7] James Hansen, *Storms of My Grandchildren* (New York: Bloomsbury 2009), pp. 70, 172-173,

[8] John M. Broder, "Obama readying emissions limits on power plants," *The New York Times*, June 20, 2013.

[9] Center for Biological Diversity, "[New mileage standards out of step with worsening climate crisis](#)," press release, August 28, 2012. Also, Common Dreams staff, "[New mileage standards encourage more gas-guzzling, not less: report](#)," Common Dreams, August 28, 2012.

[10] A full-size 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air weighed 3,100 pounds. A '55 Ford F-100 pickup truck also weighed 3,100 (3,300 with the optional V-8 motor). Even a 1955 Cadillac El Dorado, icon of 1950s conspicuous consumption, weighed only 5,050 pounds - chrome bullets, tailfins and all. By comparison, today even a compact Toyota Prius weighs 3,274 pounds (could it be the batteries?) while your typical full-size Ford Taurus weighs more than 4,300 pounds, pickup trucks and big SUVs start at around 6,000 pounds and go up from there to 7,000 to 8,000 pounds. Even though the occasional honest driver will concede he or she doesn't really "need" all this bulk and horsepower to load up at the mall, as a cheerful Texas Ford salesman noted, "We haven't found a ceiling to this luxury truck market." Joseph B. White, "Luxury pickups stray off the ranch," *Wall Street Journal*, March 21, 2012.

[11] Your typical 4,428-pound 1955 Cadillac Coupe DeVille got 12.9 mpg in city driving, according to *Motor Trend* magazine, whereas your typical 5,963-pound 2013 Cadillac

Escalade gets 10 mpg in the city (12 mpg “combined” city and highway). Your typical 2013 Chevrolet Silverado K15 truck gets just 9 mpg hauling those heavy bags of groceries home from the mall. This is after six decades of Detroit fuel economy “improvements” – and Obama says Detroit is going to “double its fleet mileage in 20 years.” Good luck on that. Mileage figures for the Cadillac are from [Cadillac History 1955](#). For the Silverado at [www.fuel economy.gov](http://www.fuel economy.gov).

[12] For forecasts of China’s vehicle fleet and its implications see Craig Simons, *The Devouring Dragon* (New York: St. Martins Press, 2013), p. 200.

[13] “A new paradigm for climate change,” *Nature Climate Change*, Vol. 2 September 2012, pp. 639-640 (my italics).

[14] IEA, [World Energy Outlook 2012 Executive Summary](#) (November 12, 2012), p. 3 .

[15] For a recent summary of the peer-reviewed literature see Glenn Scherer and DailyClimate.org, [“Climate science predictions prove too conservative,”](#) Scientific American December 6, 2012 . Prominent ex-denier Richard A. Muller published his mea culpa on the op-ed page of *The New York Times*: “The conversion of a climate-change skeptic,” July 28, 2012.

[16] World Resources Institute, [WRI Navigating the Numbers](#), Table 1. pp. 4-5 .

[17] [The Hill](#) blog .

[18] See my “Green capitalism,” op cit. pp. 131-133.

[19] Eg. David Biello, “The false promise of biofuels,” *Scientific American*, August 2011, pp. 59-65.

[20] Smith, “Green capitalism,” op cit. pp. 117-122.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] ExxonMobil, [The Outlook for Energy: A View to 2040](#) (December 2012) . See also, Jon Queally, [“BP’s Big Plan: Burn it. Burn it all,”](#) Common Dreams, January 17, 2013.

[24] Eg. John Parnell, “World on course to run out of water, warns Ban Ki-moon,” *The Guardian*, May 22, 2013. Gaia Vince, [“How the world’s oceans could be running out of](#)

fish," BBC News Online, September 12, 2012 . And as tropical forests, biodiversity is being sacrificed even in nominally protected areas at an alarming rate. See William F. Laurance et al. "Averting biodiversity collapse in tropical forest protected areas," *Nature*, no. 489 September 12, 2012 pp. 290-294. "Widespread local 'extinctions' in tropical forest 'remnants' " Also, ScienceDaily, August 14, 2012 . On minerals and oil, see Michael T. Klare, *The Race for What's Left* (New York: Picador 2012).

[25] Ecological "footprint" studies show that today humanity uses the equivalent of 1.5 planets to provide the resources we use and absorb our waste. This means it now takes the Earth one year and six months to regenerate what we use in a year. Moderate UN scenarios suggest that if current population and consumption trends continue, by the 2030s, we will need the equivalent of two Earths to support us. And of course, we have only one. Turning resources into waste faster than waste can be turned back into resources puts us in global ecological "overshoot" depleting the very resources on which human life and biodiversity depend. See the [Global Footprint Network](#).

[26] World Bank, 2008 [World Development Indicators](#), p. 4 Table 1J .

[27] Worldwatch Institute, 2010 *State of the World: Transforming Cultures From Consumerism to Sustainability* (New York: Norton, 2010) pp. 3-7ff. Also Alan Durning, *How Much is Enough?* (New York: Norton 1992). Avatar.

[28] Michael T. Klare, *The Race for What's Left*, p. 12. AP, "Tech tycoons in asteroid mining venture," *The Guardian*, April 20, 2012.

[29] "China's environmental nightmare," China Digital Times, March 12, 2012 . Lily Kuo, "China's nightmare scenario: by 2025 air quality could be much much worse," posted March 12, 2013 on Quartz.

[30] See eg. Sam Wade, " 'Growth first' mentality undermines war on pollution," China Digital Times, June 5, 2013 .

[31] Hansen, *Storms*, chapter 9. Independent Voices: "James Lovelock: Nuclear power is the only green solution," Independent, May 24, 2004 . George Monbiot, *The Guardian* columnist, has argued this in many venues but see, in particular, his blog piece: "The moral case for nuclear power," August 8, 2011 . Also, Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, "Going green? Then go nuclear," *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, May 23, 2013.

[32] Keith Johnson and Ben Lefebvre, "U.S. approves expanded gas exports," *Wall Street Journal*, May 18, 2013.

[33] John Vogel, "[Methane gas 'fracking:' 3 polls show public leaning to toward yes,](#)" *American Agriculturalist*, April 9, 2013 . Karen DeWitt, "[Poll shows increased support for fracking,](#)" North Country Public Radio, September 13, 2012 .

[34] Clothing designer Eliza Starbuck says of ultra -cheap producers like H&M "It's throwaway fashion or 'trashion.' If their prices are that cheap that people are throwing their disposable income at them - only to find that the clothes fall apart on the hangers after a wash or two - they're just creating garbage. ... It takes such a huge amount of human energy and textile fibers, dyes and chemicals to create even poor-quality clothes. They may be offering fashions at a price anyone can afford in an economic crunch, but they're being irresponsible about what happens to the goods after the consumers purchase them." Jasmin Malik Chua, "[Is H&M's new lower-priced clothing encouraging disposable fashion?](#)" *ecouterre*, September 28, 2010 . And H&M takes "disposable" literally. As *The New York Times* reported in 2012, H&M's employees systematically slash and rip perfectly good unsold clothes before tossing them in dumpsters at the back of the chain's 34th Street store in Manhattan - to make sure they can't be sold but thus adding pointlessly to landfills rather than donating them to charity. It is little remarked that capitalism is the first economic system in which perfectly serviceable, even brand new goods from clothes to automobiles (recall the "cash for clunkers" rebates) are deliberately destroyed so as to promote production of their replacements. I'll explore this interesting theme further elsewhere. See Jim Dwyer, "A clothing clearance where more than just the prices are slashed," *The New York Times*, January 5, 2010. Also, Ann Zimmerman and Neil Shah, "Taste for cheap clothes fed Bangladesh boom," *Wall Street Journal*, May 13, 2013.

[35] Juan O. Tamayo, "STASI records show Cuba deal included IKEA furniture, antiques, rum and guns," McClatchy Newspapers, May 9, 2012. James Angelos, "IKEA regrets use of East German prisoners," *Wall Street Journal*, November 16, 2012. Kamprad's soft spot for prison slave labor fits very well with his deep past as a Swedish Nazi recruiter and long-time sympathizer as detailed in a recent book by Elisabeth Asbrink. See "[Ikea founder Ingvar Kamprad's Nazi ties 'went deeper,'](#)" BBC News online August 25, 2011 .

[36] I am quoting here from Stephanie Zacharek's excellent "[IKEA is as bad as Wal-Mart,](#)" Salon.com, July 12, 2009: 12:11 PM. Reviewing Ellen Ruppel Shell, *Cheap: The High cost of Discount Culture* (New York: Penguin, 2009), chapter 6.

[37] Ida Karisson, "[IKEA products made from 600-year old trees,](#)" Inter Press Service, May 29, 2012 Common Dreams.org.

[38] Eg. Fred Pearce, "Ikea - you can't build a green reputation with a flatpack DIY manual," *Guardian*, April 2, 2009. Also: Greenpeace, [Slaughtering the Amazon](#), July 2009 . Alfonso Daniels, "Battling Siberia's devastating illegal logging trade," BBC news online, November

27, 2009.

[39] Michael Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso 2006).

[40] World Bank Development Indicators 2008, cited in Anup Shah, Poverty and stats, *Global Issues*, January 7, 2013 . World Institute for Development Economics Research of the UN cited in James Randerson, "World's richest 1% own 40% of all wealth, UN report discovers," *The Guardian*, December 6, 2006. As for trends, in 1979 the richest 1% in the U.S. earned 33.1 percent more than the bottom 20 percent. In 2000 the wealthiest 1% made 88.5 percent more than the poorest 20 percent. In the Third World, polarization has grown even worse, especially in China which in 1978 had the world's most equal incomes while today, it has the most unequal incomes of any large society. Who says capitalism doesn't work?!

[41] Adam Nossiter, "For Congo children, food today means none tomorrow," *The New York Times*, January 3, 2012.

[42] Isabel Kershner, "Israeli venture meant to serve electric cars ending its run," *The New York Times*, May 27, 2013. Ronald D. White, "One owner, low miles, will finance: sellers try to unload Fiskers," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 2013. Rachel Feintzeig, "Electric-car maker Coda files for bankruptcy," *Wall Street Journal*, May 1, 2013.

[43] Kenneth Chang, "Mars could have supported life long ago, NASA says," *The New York Times*, March 12, 2013. And Shell Oil isn't the only company having second thoughts about what its brilliant CEO thought was a sure thing: Clifford Krauss, "ConocoPhillips suspends its Arctic drilling plans," *The New York Times*, April 11, 2013.

[44] Citing a recent study by an international team of researchers in *Nature Climate Change* in May 2013, the BBC reports that if "rapid action" is not taken to curb greenhouse gases, some 34 percent of animals and 57 percent of plants will lose more than half of their current habitat ranges. Dr. Rachel Warren, the lead scientist of the study said that "our research predicts that climate change will greatly reduce the diversity of even very common species found in most parts of the world. This loss of global-scale biodiversity would significantly impoverish the biosphere and the ecosystem services it provides. There will also be a knock-on effect for humans because these species are important for things like water and air purification, flood control, nutrient cycling and eco-tourism." Matt McGrath, " 'Dramatic decline' warning for plants and animals," BBC News Online, May 12, 2013 .

[45] On the existential threat Monsanto Corporation poses to humanity and the planet, see the Green Shadow Cabinet: "What must be done about Monsanto corporation, and why," May 23, 2013 .



[46] Gallup, June 8, 2012 .

[47] Huffington Post, "GMO poll finds huge majority say foods should be labeled," March 4, 2013 .

[48] See again, Green Shadow Cabinet, "What must be done about Monsanto, and why?" op cit.

[49] Eg. Jennifer Duggan, "Kunming pollution is the tip of rising Chinese environmental activism," *The Guardian* blog post May 16, 2013.

[50] Tim Arango and Ceylan Yeginsu, "Peaceful protest over Istanbul park turns violent as police crack down," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2013.

[51] "Turkish government moots referendum on Gezi Park," Deutsche Welle, June 12, 2013 .

[52] Simon Romero, "Protests grow as Brazilians blame leaders," *The New York Times*, June 19, 2013.

[53] For further exploration of these themes see the superb piece by Michael Lowy: "Eco-socialism and democratic planning," *Socialist Register* 2007 (New York: Monthly Review 2007), p. 294-309.

[54] Greg Palast, Jerrold Oppenheim, and Theo MacGregor, *Democracy and Regulation: How the Public can Govern Essential Services* (London: Pluto, 2003) pp. 2-4. The authors point out yet another irony of this system of public regulation, namely that it was created by private companies as the lesser evil to fend off the threat of nationalization: "Modern US utility regulation is pretty much the invention of American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T) and the National Electric Light Association (NELA) - the investor-owned telephone and electric industries at the turn of the twentieth century. They saw regulation as protection against Populist and Progressive movements that, since the economic panic of 1873 and later disruptions, had galvanized anti-corporate farmer and labor organizations. By the turn of the twentieth century, these movements had galvanized considerable public support for governmental ownership of utilities. ... " p. 98.

[55] In the case of nuclear power plants, local public regulation often has been subverted and overridden by the federal government in its zealous drive to push nuclear power even against the wishes of the local public. Thus in the aftermath of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in 1979, social scientists Raymond Goldsteen and John Schorr interviewed residents around Three Mile Island about the history of the power plant, why it was built, what voice they had in the decision to build it and the decision to restart the plant after the

accident. It turns out that, as one resident, a Mrs. Kelsey, put it, they had no choice. They were virtually forced to accept it: "They [Met Ed the utility, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission] keep saying we need this nuclear. They keep pounding that into our heads with the news and everything. We need it. We need it. We can't do without it." Residents told Goldstein and Schorr that the surrounding communities petitioned against restarting the plant after the accident but lost again. Another resident, Mrs. Boswell, said, "We don't want to be guinea pigs. ... I still think that we should have a say, too, in what goes on. I really do, because we're the victims." Mrs. Brown: "The company just wants [to reopen the plant for] the money. ... " Mrs. Carmen: "No, they're going to do what they want. ... I don't think [community feelings] would bother them at all." Mrs. Hemmingway: "I feel very angry about it really, because I just feel that there is so much incompetence on the part of the utility, on the part of the NRC, on the part of the local governments. ... " Residents said that if they had been informed honestly about the risks and if they had had a choice, they would have investigated other technologies and chosen differently. Mrs. Hemmingway again: "It just seems to me there are so many alternatives we could explore. ... We obviously need alternate energy sources, but solar could provide heating for houses and water [and so on]." Residents said they would have preferred other choices even if it meant giving up certain conveniences: Mrs. Caspar: "I don't really mind conserving all that much. If people can conserve gas [for cars], why can't they conserve energy? Now I don't mean I want to go back to the scrubboard ... but I don't dry my clothes in the dryer. I hang them ... on the line ... and I do try to conserve as far as that goes." (pp. 181-183,212). One of the most interesting results of this study, which is well worth reading in full, is that it illustrates how ordinary citizens, given the chance, would make more rational decisions about technology, safety and the environment than the "experts" at the utility, Met Ed, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. It's not that they were more knowledgeable about the technology than the experts but that the experts were not impartial. They were representing the industry and profits and the NRC, not the public, so they could not help but systematically make wrong decisions, decisions that in this case not only violated the public trust and but put huge numbers of lives in danger. Raymond L. Goldstein and John K. Schorr, *Demanding Democracy After Three Mile Island* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press 1991).

[56] See again, Michael Lowy op. cit.

[57] Edward Wong, "Air pollution linked to 1.2 million premature deaths in China," *The New York Times*. April 1, 2013. Johnathan Kaiman, "Inside China's 'cancer villages,'" *The Guardian*, June 4, 2012.

Richard Smith is an economic historian. He wrote his UCLA history Ph.D. thesis on the transition to capitalism in China and held post-docs at the East-West Center in Honolulu and Rutgers University. He has written on China, capitalism and the global environment and on related issues for *New Left Review*, *Monthly Review*, *The Ecologist*, the *Journal of*



Ecological Economics, Real-World Economics Review, Adbusters magazine and other publications. He is presently completing a book on China's communist-capitalism and ecological collapse.

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## Havin Guneser: On Kurdish Struggle at EZLN Hydra Seminar



“Without understanding how masculinity was socially formed, one cannot analyze the institution of state and therefore will not be accurately be able to define the war and power culture related to statehood... This is what paved the way for femicide and the exploitation and colonization of peoples...”

Listen to the full talk by Havin Guneser [here](#).

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# Dilar Dirik: Building Democracy without the State

This article was originally published in [ROAR Magazine](#).



“When people first came to our house a few years ago to ask if our family would like to participate in the communes, I threw stones at them to keep them away,” laughs Bushra, a young woman from Tirbespiye, Rojava. The mother of two belongs to an ultra-conservative religious sect. Before, she had never been allowed to leave her home and used to cover her entire body except her eyes.

“Now I actively shape my own community,” she says with a proud and radiant smile. “People come to me to seek help in solving social issues. But at the time, if you had asked me, I wouldn’t even have known what ‘council’ meant or what people do in assemblies.”

Today, around the world, people resort to alternative forms of autonomous organization to give their existence meaning again, to reflect human creativity’s desire to express itself as freedom. These collectives, communes, cooperatives and grassroots movements can be characterized as the people’s self-defense mechanisms against the encroachment of capitalism, patriarchy and the state.

At the same time, many indigenous peoples, cultures and communities that faced exclusion and marginalization have protected their communalist ways of living until this day. It is striking that communities that protected their existence against the evolving world order

around them are often described in negative terms, as “lacking” something—notably, a state. The positivist and determinist tendencies that dominate today’s historiography render such communities unusual, uncivilized, backward. Statehood is assumed to be an inevitable consequence of civilization and modernity; a natural step in history’s linear progress.

There are undoubtedly some genealogical and ontological differences between, for lack of a better word, “modern” revolutionary communes, and natural, organic communities. The former are developing primarily among radical circles in capitalist societies as uprisings against the dominant system, while the latter pose a threat to the hegemonic powers by nature of their very survival. But still, we cannot say that these organic communes are non-political, as opposed to the metropolitan communes with their intentional, goal-oriented politics.

Centuries, perhaps millennia of resistance against the capitalist world order are in fact very radical acts of defiance. For such communities, relatively untouched by global currents due to their characteristic features, natural geography or active resistance, communal politics is simply a natural part of the world. That is why many people in Rojava, for instance, where a radical social transformation is currently underway, refer to their revolution “a return to our nature” or “the regaining of our social ethics.”

Throughout history, the Kurds suffered all sorts of denial, oppression, destruction, genocide and assimilation. They were excluded from the statist order on two fronts: not only were they denied their own state, they were simultaneously excluded from the mechanisms of the state structures around them. Yet the experience of statelessness also helped protect many societal ethics and values, as well as a sense of community—especially in the rural and mountainous villages far from the cities.

To this day, Alevi-Kurdish villages in particular are characterized by processes of common solution-finding and reconciliation rituals for social disputes based on ethics and forgiveness to the benefit of the community. But while this form of life is quite prevalent in Kurdistan, there is also a conscious new effort to establish a political system centered around communal values—the system of Democratic Confederalism, built through democratic autonomy with the commune at its heart.

## **DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM IN ROJAVA**

The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), like many national liberation movements, initially thought that the creation of an independent state would be the solution to violence and oppression. However, with the changing world after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the movement began to develop a fundamental self-criticism as well as a criticism of the dominant socialist politics of the time, which was still very much focused on seizing state

power. Towards the end of the 1990s the PKK, under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan, began to articulate an alternative to the nation state and state socialism.

Upon studying the history of Kurdistan and the Middle East, as well as the nature of power, the current economic system and ecological issues, Öcalan came to the conclusion that the reason for humanity's "freedom problem" was not statelessness but the emergence of the state. In an attempt to subvert the domination of the system that institutionalized itself across the globe over the span of 5,000 years as a synthesis of patriarchy, capitalism and the nation state, this alternative paradigm is based on the very opposite—women's liberation, ecology and grassroots democracy.

Democratic Confederalism is a social, political, and economic model of self-administration of different peoples, pioneered by women and the youth. It attempts to practically express the people's will by viewing democracy as a method rather than an aim alone. It is democracy without the state.

While it proposes new normative structures to establish a conscious political system, Democratic Confederalism also draws upon millennia-old forms of social organization that are still in existence across communities in Kurdistan and beyond. This model may seem far-fetched to our contemporary imagination, but it actually resonates well with the strong desire for emancipation among the different peoples in the region. Although the system has been implemented in Bakur (North Kurdistan) for years, within the limits of Turkish state repression, it was in Rojava (West Kurdistan) that a historic opportunity emerged to put Democratic Confederalism into practice.

The system places "democratic autonomy" at its heart: people organize themselves directly in the form of communes and create councils. In Rojava, this process is facilitated by Tev-Dem, the Movement for a Democratic Society. The commune is made up of a consciously self-organized neighborhood and constitutes the most essential and radical aspect of the democratic practice. It has committees working on different issues like peace and justice, economy, safety, education, women, youth and social services.

The communes send elected delegates to the councils. Village councils send delegates to the towns, town councils send delegates to the cities, and so on. Each of the communes is autonomous, but they are linked to one another through a confederal structure for the purposes of coordination and the safeguarding of common principles. Only when issues cannot be resolved at the base, or when issues transcend the concerns of the lower-level councils, are they delegated to the next level. The "higher" instances are accountable to the "lower" levels and report on their actions and decisions.

While the communes are the areas for problem solving and organizing everyday life, the

councils create action plans and policies for cohesion and coordination. At the start of the revolution and in the newly liberated areas, assemblies had to erect people's councils first and only later began to develop the more decentralized grassroots organizational structures in the form of communes.

The communes work towards a "moral-political" society made up of conscious individuals who understand how to resolve social issues and who take care of everyday self-governance as a common responsibility, rather than submitting to bureaucratic elites. All of this relies on the voluntary and free participation of the people, as opposed to coercion and the rule of law.

It is of course difficult to raise society's consciousness in a short span of time, especially where war conditions, embargoes, internalized mentalities and ancient despotic structures have been deeply institutionalized and can lead to power abuses and apolitical mindsets. An alternative education system, organized through academies, aims to promote a healthy social mentality, while self-organization practically reproduces a conscious society by mobilizing it in all spheres of life.

The women and youth organize autonomously and embody the social dynamics that are naturally inclined towards more democracy and less hierarchy. They position themselves "to the left" of the democratic autonomy model and formulate new forms of knowledge production and reproduction.

Today, the Kurdish freedom movement splits power equally between one woman and one man, from Qandil to Qamishlo to Paris. The idea behind the co-chair principle is both symbolic and practical—it decentralizes power and promotes consensus finding while symbolizing the harmony between women and men. Only women have the right to elect the female co-chair while the male co-chair is elected by everyone. Women organize their own, stronger, more ideologically conscious structures towards a women's confederation, starting with autonomous women's communes.

## **THE PRINCIPLE OF THE DEMOCRATIC NATION**

Another important principle articulated by Öcalan is the "democratic nation". Unlike the nation state's monist doctrine, which justifies itself through a chauvinistic myth, this concept envisions a society based on a common social contract and fundamental ethical principles such as gender equality. Thus, all individuals and groups, ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender, intellectual identities and tendencies can express themselves freely and add diversity to this expansive, ethics-based nation in order to secure its democratization. The more diverse the nation, the stronger its democracy. The different groups and sections are also in charge of democratizing themselves from within.

In Rojava, Kurds, Arabs, Syriac Christians, Armenians, Turkmen and Chechens try to create a new life together. The same logic underlies the project of the People's Democratic Party, or HDP, across the border in Turkey. The HDP united all communities of Mesopotamia and Anatolia under the umbrella of "free togetherness" in the democratic nation.

Among its MPs it counts Kurds, Turks, Armenians, Arabs, Assyrians, Muslims, Alevis, Christians and Yazidis—a greater diversity than any other party in the Turkish Parliament. Contrasted with the monopolism of the nation-state ideology, the concept of the democratic nation serves as an ideological self-defense mechanism of diverse peoples.

Although many different communities actively participate in the Rojava revolution, long-standing resentments prevail. Entire tribal confederations of Arabs unilaterally expressed their support for the administration, but in some parts, Arabs remain suspicious. Secret service documents reveal that already in the early 1960s, Syria's Baath party made highly sophisticated plans to pitch different communities against one another, especially in Cizire. On top of the pre-existing tensions, external forces additionally fuel and instrumentalize conflict between different communities to further their own agendas. The establishment of unity between the different ethnic and religious groups of Syria, and in the Middle East more generally, would make it more difficult to divide and rule the region. One Arab member of the Rojava administration explained why this democratic model counts on so little support from the established as well as newly formed political groups in the region and beyond:

The democratic autonomy system in our three cantons shakes and upsets the whole world because the capitalist system does not want freedom and democracy for the Middle East, despite all its pretensions. That is why everyone attacks Rojava. The different forms of state exemplified by the Syrian Arab Republic under Assad and the Islamic State are two sides of the same coin as they deny and destroy the diversity mosaic of our region. But more and more Arabs from the rest of Syria come to Rojava to learn about democratic autonomy because they see a perspective for freedom here.

## AN ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL VISION

The effective system of self-organization, combined to some extent with the embargo, which necessitated self-reliance and thereby fueled creativity, spared Rojava from economic corruption through internal capitalist mindsets or external exploitation. Yet in order to defend revolutionary values beyond the war, a calibrated economic vision is needed for a socially just, ecological, feminist economy that can sustain an impoverished, traumatized and brutalized population.

How to engage wealthy people, who do not care for cooperatives, and avoid being charged with authoritarianism? How to arrange emancipatory and liberationist principles in the urgency of war and a survival economy? How to decentralize the economy while securing justice and revolutionary cohesion? For the people in Rojava, the answer lies in education.

“What does ecology mean to you?” a woman at the Ishtar women’s academy in Rimelan asks her peers in a room decorated with photos of women like Sakine Cansiz and Rosa Luxemburg. An older woman with traditional tattoos on her hands and face responds: “To me, being a mother means to be ecological. To live in harmony with the community and nature. Mothers know best how to maintain and organize this harmony.” Perhaps it is the ecological question that most clearly illustrates Rojava’s dilemma of having great principles and intentions and the willingness to sacrifice, while often lacking the conditions to implement these ideals. For obvious reasons, survival often has priority over environmentalism.

For the moment, at least, it is possible to speak of a transitional dual system in which the democratic self-administration of Rojava lays out revolutionary and ecological principles, carefully maneuvering them in war and real politics, while the grassroots movement organizes the population from below. At the cantonal level, especially with regards to foreign policy-related issues, centralist or at least non-revolutionary practices are to some extent inevitable, especially because Rojava is politically and economically between a rock and a hard place. It is the democratic autonomy system arising from the base that people generally refer to when they speak of the “Rojava revolution”.

The decentralizing dynamics of the grassroots organization, most notably in the communes, even serve as an internal opposition to the cantons and facilitate the democratization of the latter, which, due to their complicated political geography—further limited by non-revolutionary parties and groups within—can tend towards a concentration of power (though the cantons, as they currently are, are still far more decentralized and democratic than ordinary states).

Far more important than the exact mechanisms through which the popular will is expressed,

is the meaning and impact of democratic autonomy on the people themselves. If I were to describe “radical democracy”, I would think especially of the working class people, the sometimes illiterate women in neighborhoods who decided to organize themselves in communes and who now make politics come to life. Children’s laughter and games, cackling chicken, scooting plastic chairs compose the melody for the stage in which decisions on electricity hours and neighborhood disputes are made. One should also note that the structures function better in rural areas and small neighborhoods than in big and complex cities, where more effort is needed to engage people. Here, power belongs to people who never had anything and who now write their own history.

“Do you want to see our vegetables?” Qadifa, an older Yazidi woman asks me in a center of Yekîtiya Star, the women’s movement. She appears to have little interest in explaining the new system, but she is keen to show its fruits instead. We continue our conversation on the transformations of everyday life in Rojava while eating the delicious tomatoes of a women’s cooperative in the backyard.

Self-determination in Rojava is being lived in the here and now, in everyday practice. Thousands of women like Qadifa, women previously completely marginalized, invisible and voiceless, now assume leadership positions and shape society. Today, in the mornings, they can for the first time harvest their own tomatoes from the land that was colonized by the state for decades, while acting as judges in people’s courts in the afternoon.

Many families dedicate themselves fully to the revolution now; especially those who lost loved ones. Many family homes slowly start to function like the people’s houses (“*mala gel*”) that coordinate the population’s needs: people walk into each other’s houses with their children to criticize or discuss or suggest ideas on how to improve their new lives. Dinner table topics have changed. Social issues literally become social, by becoming everyone’s responsibility. Every member of the community becomes a leader.

The slow transition of social decision-making from assigned buildings to the areas of everyday life is a fruit of the efforts to build a new moral-political society. For people from advanced capitalist countries this direct way of being in charge of one’s life can seem scary sometimes, especially when important things like justice, education and security are now in the hands of people like oneself, rather than being surrendered to anonymous state apparatuses.

## **THE COMMUNE’S LEGACY OF RESISTANCE**

One night I am sitting near Tell Mozan, once home to Urkesh, the 6,000-year-old ancient capital of the Hurrians. Nearby is the border between Syria and Turkey, less than a century old. While drinking tea with Meryem, a female commander of Kobane, we watch the lights of



the town of Mardin in North Kurdistan, on the other side of the border.

“We fight on behalf of the community, the oppressed, of all women, for the unwritten pages of history,” she says. Meryem is one of the many women who met Abdullah Öcalan in her youth, when he arrived in Rojava back in the 1980s. Like thousands of women, in a quest for justice beyond her own life, one day she decided to become a freedom fighter in this region that is at the same time home to thousands of honor killings and thousands of goddesses, worshiped in all shapes and sizes.

What attracted anti-systemic movements around the world to the historic resistance in Kobane were perhaps the many ways in which the town’s defense mirrored a millennia-old current of human struggle; the ways in which it carried universal traits that resonated with collective imaginaries of a different world. Many comparisons were made with the Paris Commune, the Battle of Stalingrad, the Spanish Civil War, and other almost mythical instances of popular resistance.

In the *ziggurats* of Sumer, massive temple complexes in ancient Mesopotamia, many hierarchical mechanisms began to be institutionalized for the first time: patriarchy, the state, slavery, the standing army and private property—the beginning of the formalized class society. This era brought about a far-reaching social rupture characterized by the loss of women’s social status and the rise of the dominant male, especially the male priest, who seized the monopoly on knowledge. But this is also where *amargi*, the first word for the concept of freedom, literally “the return to mother”, emerged around 2,300 B.C.

Öcalan proposes the idea of two civilizations: he claims that towards the end of the Neolithic Age with the rise of hierarchical structures in ancient Sumer a civilization developed based on hierarchy, violence, subjugation and monopolism—the “mainstream” or “dominant civilization”. By contrast, what he calls “democratic civilization” represents the historic struggles of the marginalized, the oppressed, the poor and the excluded, especially women. Democratic Confederalism is therefore a political product and manifestation of this age-old democratic civilization.

The democratic autonomy model it has given rise to, in turn, is not only a promising perspective for a peaceful and just solution to the traumatic conflicts of the region; in many ways, the emergence of the Rojava revolution illustrates how democratic autonomy may actually be the only way to survive. In this sense, the revolutionary commune is a historical heritage, a source of collective memory for the forces of democracy around the globe, and a conscious mechanism of self-defense against the state system. It carries a millennia-old legacy and manifests itself in novel ways today.

What unites historic moments of human resistance and the desire for another world, from

the first freedom fighters of history to the Paris commune to the uprising of the Zapatistas on to the freedom squares in Rojava, is the unbreakable power to dare to imagine. It is the courage to believe that oppression is not fate. It is the expression of humanity's ancient desire to set itself free.

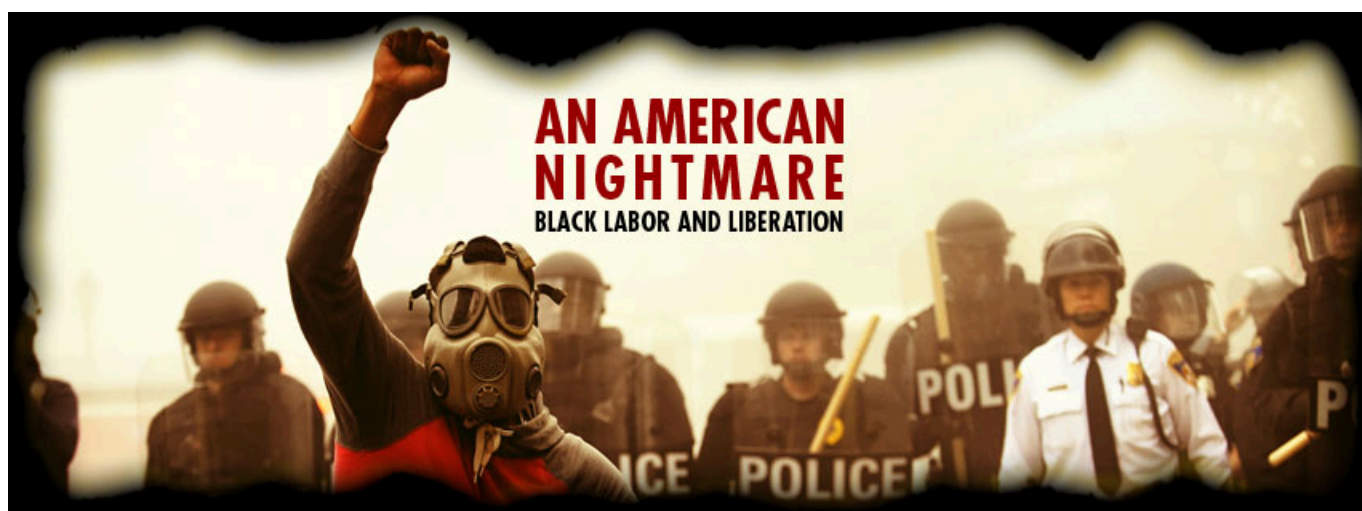
*Bijî komunên me! Vive la commune!*

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## Kali Akuno: Until We Win: Black Labor and Liberation in the Disposable Era

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Since the rebellion in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014, Black people throughout the United States have been grappling with a number of critical questions such as why are Black people being hunted and killed every 28 hours or more by various operatives of the law? Why don't Black people seem to matter to this society? And what can and must we do to end these attacks and liberate ourselves? There are concrete answers to these questions.

Answers that are firmly grounded in the capitalist dynamics that structure the brutal European settler-colonial project we live in and how Afrikan people have historically been positioned within it.

## The Value of Black Life

There was a time in the United States Empire, when Afrikan people, aka, Black people, were deemed to be extremely valuable to the “American project”, when our lives as it is said, “mattered”. This “time” was the era of chattel slavery, when the labor provided by Afrikan people was indispensable to the settler-colonial enterprise, accounting for nearly half of the commodified value produced within its holdings and exchanged in “domestic” and international markets. Our ancestors were held and regarded as prize horses or bulls, something to be treated with a degree of “care” (i.e. enough to ensure that they were able to work and reproduce their labor, and produce value for their enslavers) because of their centrality to the processes of material production.

What mattered was Black labor power and how it could be harnessed and controlled, not Afrikan humanity. Afrikan humanity did not matter - it had to be denied in order create and sustain the social rationale and systemic dynamics that allowed for the commodification of human beings. These “dynamics” included armed militias and slave patrols, iron-clad non-exception social clauses like the “one-drop” rule, the slave codes, vagrancy laws, and a complex mix of laws and social customs all aimed at oppressing, controlling and scientifically exploiting Black life and labor to the maximum degree. This systemic need served the variants of white supremacy, colonial subjugation, and imperialism that capitalism built to govern social relations in the United States. All of the fundamental systems created to control Afrikan life and labor between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are still in operation today, despite a few surface moderations, and serve the same basic functions.

The correlation between capital accumulation (earning a profit) and the value of Black life to the overall system has remained consistent throughout the history of the US settler-colonial project, despite of shifts in production regimes (from agricultural, to industrial, to service and finance oriented) and how Black labor was deployed. The more value (profits) Black labor produces, the more Black lives are valued. The less value (profits) Black people produce, the less Black lives are valued. When Black lives are valued they are secured enough to allow for their reproduction (at the very least), when they are not they can be and have been readily discarded and disposed of. This is the basic equation and the basic social dynamic regarding the value of Black life to US society.

## The Age of Disposability

We are living and struggling through a transformative era of the global capitalist system.

Over the past 40 years, the expansionary dynamics of the system have produced a truly coordinated system of resource acquisition and controls, easily exploitable and cheap labor, production, marketing and consumption on a global scale. The increasingly automated and computerized dynamics of this expansion has resulted in millions, if not billions, of people being displaced through two broad processes: one, from “traditional” methods of life sustaining production (mainly farming), and the other from their “traditional” or ancestral homelands and regions (with people being forced to move to large cities and “foreign” territories in order to survive). As the International Labor Organization (ILO) recently reported in its World Employment and Social Outlook 2015 paper, this displacement renders millions to structurally regulated surplus or expendable statuses.

Capitalist logic does not allow for surplus populations to be sustained for long. They either have to be reabsorbed into the value producing mechanisms of the system, or disposed of. Events over the past 20 (or more) years, such as the forced separation of Yugoslavia, the genocide in Burundi and Rwanda, the never ending civil and international wars in Zaire/Congo and central Afrikan region, the mass displacement of farmers in Mexico clearly indicate that the system does not possess the current capacity to absorb the surplus populations and maintain its equilibrium.

The dominant actors in the global economy - multinational corporations, the trans-nationalist capitalist class, and state managers - are in crisis mode trying to figure out how to best manage this massive surplus in a politically justifiable (but expedient) manner.

This incapacity to manage crisis caused by capitalism itself is witnessed by numerous examples of haphazard intervention at managing the rapidly expanding number of displaced peoples such as:

- \* The ongoing global food crisis (which started in the mid-2000's) where millions are unable to afford basic food stuffs because of rising prices and climate induced production shortages;
- \* The corporate driven displacement of hundreds of millions of farmers and workers in the global south (particularly in Africa and parts of Southeast Asia);

- \* Military responses (including the building of fortified walls and blockades) to the massive migrant crisis confronting the governments of the United States, Western Europe, Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, etc.;
- \*The corporate driven attempt to confront climate change almost exclusively by market (commodity) mechanisms;
- \*The scramble for domination of resources and labor, and the escalating number of imperialist facilitated armed conflicts and attempts at regime change in Africa, Asia (including Central Asia) and Eastern Europe.

More starkly, direct disposal experiments are also deepening and expanding:

- \* Against Afrikans in Colombia,
- \* Haitians in the Dominican Republic,
- \* Sub-Saharan Afrikans in Libya,
- \* Indigenous peoples in the Andean region,
- \* The Palestinians in Gaza, Adivasis in India,
- \* The Rohingya's in Myanmar and Bangladesh,
- \* And the list goes on.

Accompanying all of this is the ever expanding level of xenophobia and violence targeted at migrants on a world scale, pitting the unevenly pacified and rewarded victims of imperialism against one other as has been witnessed in places like South Africa over the last

decade, where attacks on migrant workers and communities has become a mainstay of political activity.

The capitalist system is demonstrating, day by day, that it no longer possesses the managerial capacity to absorb newly dislocated and displaced populations into the international working class (proletariat), and it is becoming harder and harder for the international ruling class to sustain the provision of material benefits that have traditionally been awarded to the most loyal subjects of capitalism's global empire, namely the "native" working classes in Western Europe and settlers in projects like the United States, Canada, and Australia.

When the capitalist system can't expand and absorb it must preserve itself by shifting towards "correction and contraction" - excluding and if necessary disposing of all the surpluses that cannot be absorbed or consumed at a profit). We are now clearly in an era of correction and contraction that will have genocidal consequences for the surplus populations of the world if left unaddressed.

This dynamic brings us back to the US and the crisis of jobs, mass incarceration and the escalating number of extrajudicial police killings confronting Black people.

### The Black Surplus Challenge/Problem

African, or Black, people in the United States are one of these surplus populations. Black people are no longer a central force in the productive process of the United States, in large part because those manufacturing industries that have not completely offshored their production no longer need large quantities of relatively cheap labor due to automation advances. At the same time agricultural industries have been largely mechanized or require even cheaper sources of super-exploited labor from migrant workers in order to ensure profits.

Various campaigns to reduce the cost of Black labor in the US have fundamentally failed, due to the militant resistance of Black labor and the ability of Black working class communities to "make ends meet" by engaging in and receiving survival level resources from the underground economy, which has grown exponentially in the Black community since the 1970's. (The underground economy has exploded worldwide since the 1970's due to the growth of unregulated "grey market" service economies and the explosion of the illicit drug trade. Its expansion has created considerable "market distortions" throughout the world, as it has created new value chains, circuits of accumulation, and financing streams that helped "cook the books" of banking institutions worldwide and helped finance capital become the dominant faction of capital in the 1980's and 90's).

The social dimensions of white supremacy regarding consumer “comfort”, “trust” and “security” seriously constrain the opportunities of Black workers in service industries and retail work, as significant numbers of non-Black consumers are uncomfortable receiving direct services from Black people (save for things like custodial and security services). These are the root causes of what many are calling the “Black jobs crisis”. The lack of jobs for Black people translates into a lack of need for Black people, which equates into the wholesale devaluation of Black life. And anything without value in the capitalist system is disposable.

The declining “value” of Black life is not a new problem – Black people have constituted an escalating problem in search of a solution for the US ruling class since the 1960’s. Although the US labor market started to have trouble absorbing Afrikan workers in the 1950’s, the surplus problem didn’t reach crisis proportions until the late 1960’s, when the Black Liberation Movement started to critically impact industrial production with demands for more jobs, training and open access to skilled and supervisory work (which were “occupied” by white seniority-protected workers), higher wages, direct representation (through instruments like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers), constant strikes, work stoppages, other forms of industrial action, militant resistance to state and non-state forces of repression and hundreds of urban rebellions.

This resistance occurred at the same time that the international regime of integrated production, trade management, and financial integration, and currency convergence instituted by the United States after WWII, commonly called the Bretton Woods regime, fully matured and ushered in the present phase of globalization. This regime obliterated most exclusivist (or protectionist) production regimes and allowed international capital to scour the world for cheaper sources of labor and raw materials without fear of inter-imperialist rivalry and interference (as predominated during earlier periods). Thus, Black labor was hitting its stride just as capital was finding secure ways to eliminate its dependence upon it (and Western unionized labor more generally) by starting to reap the rewards of its post-WWII mega-global investments (largely centered in Western Europe, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan).

One reward of these mega-global investments for US capital was that it reduced the scale and need for domestic industrial production, which limited the ability of Black labor to disrupt the system with work stoppages, strikes, and other forms of industrial action. As US capital rapidly reduced the scale of its domestic production in the 1970’s and 80’s, it intentionally elevated competition between white workers and Afrikan and other non-settler sources of labor for the crumbs it was still doling out. The settler-world view, position, and systems of entitlement possessed by the vast majority of white workers compelled them to support the overall initiatives of capital and to block the infusion of Afrikan, Xicano, Puerto Rican and other non-white labor when there were opportunities to do so during this period.

This development provided the social base for the “silent majority,” “law and order,” “tuff on crime,” “war on drugs,” “war on gangs and thugs” campaigns that dominated the national political landscape from the late 1960’s through the early 2000’s, that lead to mass incarceration, racist drug laws, and militarized policing that have terrorized Afrikan (and Indigenous, Xicano, Puerto Rican, etc.) communities since the 1970’s.

To deal with the crisis of Black labor redundancy and mass resistance the ruling class responded by creating a multipronged strategy of limited incorporation, counterinsurgency, and mass containment. The stratagem of limited incorporation sought to and has partially succeeded in dividing the Black community by class, as corporations and the state have been able to take in and utilize the skills of sectors of the Black petit bourgeoisie and working class for their own benefit. The stratagem of counterinsurgency crushed, divided and severely weakened Black organizations. And the stratagem of containment resulted in millions of Black people effectively being re-enslaved and warehoused in prisons throughout the US empire.

This three-pronged strategy exhausted itself by the mid-2000 as core dynamics of it (particularly the costs associated with mass incarceration and warehousing) became increasingly unprofitable and therefore unsustainable. Experiments with alternative forms of incarceration (like digitally monitored home detainment) and the spatial isolation and externalization of the Afrikan surplus population to the suburbs and exurbs currently abound, but no new comprehensive strategy has yet been devised by the ruling class to solve the problem of what to do and what politically can be done to address the Black surplus population problem. All that is clear from events like the catastrophe following Hurricane Katrina and the hundreds of Afrikans being daily, monthly, and yearly extra-judicially killed by various law enforcement agencies is that Black life is becoming increasingly more disposable. And it is becoming more disposable because in the context of the American capitalist socio-economic system, Black life is a commodity rapidly depreciating in value, but still must be corralled and controlled.

### A Potential Path of Resistance

Although Afrikan people are essentially “talking instruments” to the overlords of the capitalist system, Black people have always possessed our own agency. Since the dawn of the Afrikan slave trade and the development of the mercantile plantations and chattel slavery, Black people resisted their enslavement and the systemic logic and dynamics of the capitalist system itself.

The fundamental question confronting Afrikan people since their enslavement and



colonization in territories held by the US government is to what extent can Black people be the agents and instruments of their own liberation and history? It is clear that merely being the object or appendage of someone else's project and history only leads to a disposable future. Black people have to forge their own future and chart a clear self-determining course of action in order to be more than just a mere footnote in world history.

Self-determination and social liberation, how do we get there? How will we take care of our own material needs (food, water, shelter, clothing, health care, defense, jobs, etc.)? How will we address the social contradictions that shape and define us, both internally and externally generated? How should we and will we express our political independence?

There are no easy or cookie cutter answers. However, there are some general principles and dynamics that I believe are perfectly clear. Given how we have been structurally positioned as a disposable, surplus population by the US empire we need to build a mass movement that focuses as much on organizing and building *autonomous, self-organized and executed social projects* as it focuses on campaigns and initiatives that apply *transformative pressure on the government and the forces of economic exploitation and domination*. This is imperative, especially when we clearly understand the imperatives of the system we are fighting against.

The capitalism system has always required certain levels of worker "reserves" (the army of the unemployed) in order to control labor costs and maintain social control. But, the system must now do two things simultaneously to maintain profits: drastically reduce the cost of all labor and ruthlessly discard millions of jobs and laborers. "You are on your own," is the only social rationale the system has the capacity to process and its overlords insist that "there is no alternative" to the program of pain that they have to implement and administer. To the system therefore, Black people can either accept their fate as a disposable population, or go to hell. We have to therefore create our own options and do everything we can to eliminate the systemic threat that confronts us.

Autonomous projects are initiatives not supported or organized by the government (state) or some variant of monopoly capital (finance or corporate industrial or mercantile capital). These are initiatives that directly seek to create a democratic "economy of need" around organizing sustainable institutions that satisfy people's basic needs around principles of social solidarity and participatory or direct democracy that intentionally put the needs of people before the needs of profit. These initiatives are built and sustained by people organizing themselves and collectivizing their resources through dues paying membership structures, income sharing, resource sharing, time banking, etc., to amass the initial resources needed to start and sustain our initiatives. These types of projects range from organizing community farms (focused on developing the capacity to feed thousands of people) to forming people's self-defense networks to organizing non-market housing

projects to building cooperatives to fulfill our material needs. To ensure that these are not mere Black capitalist enterprises, these initiatives must be built democratically from the ground up and must be owned, operated, and controlled by their workers and consumers. These are essentially “serve the people” or “survival programs” that help the people to sustain and attain a degree of autonomy and self-rule. Our challenge is marshaling enough resources and organizing these projects on a large enough scale to eventually meet the material needs of nearly 40 million people. And overcoming the various pressures that will be brought to bear on these institutions by the forces of capital to either criminalize and crush them during their development (via restrictions on access to finance, market access, legal security, etc.) or co-opt them and reincorporate them fully into the capitalist market if they survive and thrive.

Our pressure exerting initiatives must be focused on creating enough democratic and social space for us to organize ourselves in a self-determined manner. We should be under no illusion that the system can be reformed, it cannot. Capitalism and its bourgeois national-states, the US government being the most dominant amongst them, have demonstrated a tremendous ability to adapt to and absorb disruptive social forces and their demands - when it has ample surpluses. The capitalist system has essentially run out of surpluses, and therefore does not possess the flexibility that it once did.

Because real profits have declined since the late 1960's, capitalism has resorted to operating largely on a parasitic basis, commonly referred to as neo-liberalism, which calls for the dismantling of the social welfare state, privatizing the social resources of the state, eliminating institutions of social solidarity (like trade unions), eliminating safety standards and protections, promoting the monopoly of trade by corporations, and running financial markets like casinos.

Our objectives therefore, must be structural and necessitate nothing less than complete social transformation. To press for our goals we must seek to exert maximum pressure by organizing mass campaigns that are strategic and tactically flexible, including mass action (protest) methods, direct action methods, boycotts, non-compliance methods, occupations, and various types of people's or popular assemblies. The challenges here are not becoming sidelined and subordinated to someone else's agenda - in particular that of the Democratic party (which has been the grave of social movements for generations) - and not getting distracted by symbolic reforms or losing sight of the strategic in the pursuit of the expedient.

What the combination of these efforts will amount to is the creation of Black Autonomous Zones. These Autonomous Zones must serve as centers for collective survival, collective defense, collective self-sufficiency and social solidarity. However, we have to be clear that while building Black Autonomous Zones is necessary, they are not sufficient in and of

themselves. In addition to advancing our own autonomous development and political independence, we have to build a revolutionary international movement. We are not going to transform the world on our own. As noted throughout this short work, Black people in the US are not the only people confronting massive displacement, dislocation, disposability, and genocide, various people's and sectors of the working class throughout the US and the world are confronting these existential challenges and seeking concrete solutions and real allies as much as we do.

Our Autonomous Zones must link with, build with, and politically unite with oppressed, exploited and marginalized peoples, social sectors and social movements throughout the US and the world. The Autonomous Zones must link with Indigenous communities, Xicano's and other communities stemming from the Caribbean, and Central and South America. We must also build alliances with poor and working class whites. It is essential that we help to serve as an alternative (or at least a counterweight) to the reactionary and outright fascist socialization and influences the white working class is constantly bombarded with.

Our Autonomous Zones should seek to serve as new fronts of class struggle that unite forces that are presently separated by white supremacy, xenophobia and other instruments of hierarchy, oppression and hatred. The knowledge drawn from countless generations of Black oppression must become known and shared by all exploited and oppressed people. We have to unite on the basis of a global anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-colonial program that centers the liberation of Indigenous, colonized, and oppressed peoples and the total social and material emancipation of all those who labor and create the value that drives human civilization. We must do so by creating a regenerative economic system that harmonizes human production and consumption with the limits of the Earth's biosphere and the needs of all our extended relatives - the non-human species who occupy 99.9 percent of our ecosystem. This is no small task, but our survival as a people and as a species depends upon it.

The tremendous imbalance of forces in favor of capital and the instruments of imperialism largely dictates that the strategy needed to implement this program calls for the transformation of the oppressive social relationships that define our life from the "bottom up" through radical social movements. These social movements must challenge capital and the commodification of life and society at every turn, while at the same time building up its own social and material reserves for the inevitable frontal assaults that will be launched against our social movements and the people themselves by the forces of reaction. Ultimately, the forces of liberation are going to have to prepare themselves and all the progressive forces in society for a prolonged battle to destroy the repressive arms of the state as the final enforcer of bourgeois social control in the world capitalist system. As recent events Greece painfully illustrate, our international movement will have to simultaneously win, transform, and dismantle the capitalist state at the same time in order

to secure the democratic space necessary for a revolutionary movement to accomplish the most minimal of its objectives.

### Return to the Source

The intersecting, oppressive systems of capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, and white supremacy have consistently tried to reduce African people to objects, tools, chattel, and cheap labor. Despite the systemic impositions and constraints these systems have tried to impose, Afrikan people never lost sight of their humanity, never lost sight of their own value, and never conceded defeat.

In the age of mounting human surplus and the devaluation and disposal of life, Afrikan people are going to have to call on the strengths of our ancestors and the lessons learned in over 500 years of struggle against the systems of oppression and exploitation that beset them. Building a self-determining future based on self-respect, self-reliance, social solidarity, cooperative development and internationalism is a way forward that offers us the chance to survive and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

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## Pablo González Casanova: Crisis: Tendencias y alternativas

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ESCENA COTIDIANA EN EL ZÓCALO CAPITALINO. FOTO MARÍA MELÉNDREZ PARADA.

El sistema de dominación y acumulación en que vivimos -conocido como capitalismo- tiene como atractor principal: la acumulación de poder y riquezas. En su comportamiento actual, para lograr sus fines el sistema emplea todos los modos de producción que lo precedieron. Combina el trabajo asalariado con el esclavismo, y uno y otro con el trabajo del siervo y con las nuevas formas de tributación y despojo, que hoy se ocultan en deudas impagables y créditos usureros, que los acreedores cobran con bienes y territorios por las buenas o por la fuerza.

A los países endeudados, cuando les llega la hora de pagar y no tienen con qué, los hacen acumular deuda sobre deuda y pagar más y más intereses hasta que por fin los embargan y los obligan a desnacionalizar y privatizar propiedades nacionales y estatales... es decir, los despojan. Esa es la nueva acumulación primitiva o por desposesión en una de sus muchas variantes. Todo ocurre en un conocido proceso por el que los gobiernos deudores someten sus decisiones, su dignidad y sus políticas a las corporaciones y complejos acreedores, que son quienes realmente mandan.

Los políticos colaboracionistas creen que ser un buen político es obedecer a esos que mandan, es enriquecerse con los que mandan, y es llegar a ser como los que mandan. Piensan que así es la vida, y hasta dicen y se dicen, que la historia también es así, y que quienes no entienden los cambios actuales se están aferrando a un pasado que ya no existe, y se ocultan los avances con sus necios prejuicios.

Piensan también que en este mundo, aunque no lo digamos, todos somos sinvergüenzas, pero que ellos -los políticos distinguidos, y que mandan queramos o no- son más inteligentes y eficaces que quienes los critican. Ganas tuvieran sus opositores de ser como ellos. Así piensan.

Todo lo anterior parecería anecdótico si no sirviera para darnos cuenta que la crisis que vivimos es una crisis económica, moral, intelectual, política y social. Es una crisis que abarca todas las actividades de la vida humana, incluso las del conocimiento de lo que pasa y de lo que va a venir en el mundo y el país, en que sus trabajadores de tierra, mar y aire, sus campesinos, agricultores y mineros, sus comunidades indígenas y no indígenas, sus sectores medios y sus juventudes, tendrán más posibilidades de defenderse, y de ganar, si a una organización de organizaciones sectoriales, regionales, fabriles, comunales, barriales, añaden la organización desde abajo y con los de abajo de su voluntad colectiva y personal; la organización de su conocimiento y del saber, la organización de su conciencia para mejor lograr lo que los trabajadores y los pueblos quieren, y para impulsar -lo que es fundamental- el fortalecimiento y organización de nuestra moral de lucha, de nuestra moral de cooperación, de compañerismo, y, también, de concertación de voluntades tanto para resistir, como para luchar, y construir las relaciones y estructuras de otro mundo posible y necesario en que, con la democracia -como poder del pueblo- este organice la vida y el trabajo para alcanzar esa emancipación, esa libertad y ese respeto a las diferencias de raza, edad, sexo, religión, filosofía, para las que la humanidad dispone hoy de conocimientos y técnicas que consoliden la emancipación humana.

Si los sueños del pasado se quedaron en sueños -y los sueños, sueños son-, hoy, con las técnicas de organización de que disponemos y una fuerte moral colectiva, se pueden realizar, si no cejamos en nuestra decisión de lucha y nos organizamos en redes, en coordinadoras, en colectividades, en comités de fábrica, de barrio, de calle y en otros enlaces presenciales y a distancia, que constituyan un nuevo tipo de partido capaz de construir las bases de otro mundo posible.

Hoy podemos hacer que nuestra lucha solidaria de pueblos y trabajadores viva ese paso de lo ideal que se vuelve real. Sí se puede, aunque estemos en plena tormenta, o por eso mismo.

La crisis en que vivimos es una crisis que rompe muchas de las tendencias que se daban, en particular las que buscan su solución dentro del actual sistema de dominación y acumulación capitalista, con sus mentirosos actos caritativos, generosos, humanitarios, y hoy, hasta dizque para salvar la tierra que ellos mismos están destruyendo con su entrañable codicia.

Las grandes crisis de este sistema de dominación y acumulación movido por el afán de

poder, de riquezas y utilidades no sólo obedecen a que baja la tasa de utilidades de las compañías, o a que hay problemas de sobreproducción o de subconsumo. No sólo se deben a especulaciones de unos cuantos banqueros que quiebran a miles de deudores, como la crisis que se desencadenaron en 2008 y que sirvió de detonador de la que el mundo todavía no sale.

Las crisis se producen también deliberadamente por las corporaciones financieras para maximizar su poder, sus riquezas y utilidades, para debilitar a los trabajadores y hacerlos que pierdan sus derechos y bajen la fuerza de sus demandas y, que hasta para comer se sometan a toda suerte de tiempos, ritmos, riesgos, salarios de hambre, enfermedades seguras, y daños incurables.

Las crisis inducidas sirven a la vez para que las grandes corporaciones hagan negocios a costa de medianas y pequeñas empresas, y hasta de países a lo que sacan fuera de los mercados nacionales e internacionales, o a los que entre deudas, presiones y colusiones someten, suplantando o integran a sus propias compañías privadas -como es el caso del petróleo mexicano-, o de inmensas regiones del territorio nacional que pasan y pasarán a ser “enclaves coloniales”.

Las crisis inducidas se enfocan también contra los servicios públicos que los grandes capitales quieren privatizar a toda prisa, o en incesantes acometidas, como ocurre con las universidades, los hospitales, las pensiones... y con la educación toda, que buscan desmoronar para transformarla en negocios de unos cuantos.

En los servicios públicos codiciados incluyen hasta las pensiones y jubilaciones y el conjunto de la seguridad social. Todas esas actividades en vez de ser una carga fiscal aumentan sus haberes y poderes. Así como patronos de la educación forman estudiantes mental y materialmente eficaces y eficientes para los servicios que requieren, y como patronos de los hospitales estimulan tratamientos y medicamentos que duran tanto como lo que permiten los recursos y seguros de los clientes...

Empeñados en tan fieros empeños, los grandes patronos ni por asomo piensan en las personas a las que despojan y ponen en la calle, sanos o enfermos, y que de la noche a la mañana se quedan sin recursos para sus gastos elementales de salud, educación, pensiones, producción, comunicación, servicios, alimentación y hasta de agua para beber.

Es más a quienes se vuelven vendedores de la calle, cuidadores de automóviles, boleros, plomeros, relojeros les quitan sus trabajos con persecuciones de la policía o con productos que ya no tienen compostura, o que “compactos” salen de las grandes fábricas y cuando una pieza no sirve se van a la basura.

La variada ofensiva afecta a grandes y pequeños países, campos y ciudades, montes y lagos; ríos y mares; suelos y subsuelos lo cual significa una creciente disminución de los empleos y de las fuentes de trabajo, medidas a las que acompañan con macropolíticas de represión y corrupción que no sólo incluyen la violación de los derechos nacionales sobre el territorio, la población, la soberanía, sino los derechos humanos que ellos mismos dicen defender y que de por sí ya están muy limitados.

Entre sus agresiones destaca el incesante ataque a los derechos agrarios de las comunidades, y el despojo por narcos y mafiosos de los recursos y las tierras de ejidatarios, comuneros y pequeños propietarios. La ofensiva no sólo incluye los derechos sociales y los de agricultores y campesinos sino los derechos sindicales, y los derechos ciudadanos. Es más a la devaluación de la moneda, a la inflación creciente que prepotentemente juraron controlar, añaden la congelación de salarios en moneda y especie, o en servicios y mercados antes subsidiados y hoy desaparecidos o por desaparecer, a favor de las megaempresas que todo lo producen y todo lo venden, hasta las semillas de que la vida no nace, y los remedios que desatan pandemias.

Mientras eso y más ocurre -y al mismo tiempo- los hacedores de tanto daño se pasean y pavonean haciendo como que son grandes señores, respetables funcionarios, responsables y seguros empresarios, eficientes y eficaces hombres de Estado. A su pública apariencia añaden un doble teatro que también pone en crisis la realidad. Desapareciéndola... ¡La realidad no aparece!

De un lado si el éxito de la dominación en crisis se debe a la cooptación y colusión de cuadros y clientelas subordinadas y subrogadas que circulan a través de todo el sistema gubernamental abierto y encubierto, de otro se debe al arte maravilloso de la televisión, de la propaganda a la sociedad de consumo, combinada con mezclas, alianzas y amalgamas de una macropolítica de corrupción y represión que funciona desde los grandes mandos de la globalización neoliberal y “desde la sombra” hasta los gobiernos y grupos criminales abiertos y encubiertos que juegan sus respectivos papeles entre autonomías y sujeciones, entre soberanías y servidumbres, amalgamadas o coludidas.

Con razón muchos autores no sólo hablan de una crisis del capitalismo sino de una crisis de la civilización. Algo de eso es lo que está pasando aquí y en el mundo que domina el complejo empresarial-militar-político y mediático de Estados Unidos y de la Unión Europea, con sus redes de aliados, socios y subordinados de una globalización que se distingue de la política imperialista anterior, por lo menos en dos terrenos: Uno consiste en que más que dominar a los Estados-nación desde un centro rector, las sedes imperiales están organizando una burguesía global, cuyos enlaces consolidados reciben el apoyo necesario para enriquecerse y acumular, siempre que del ingreso nacional total, las corporaciones se queden con la mayor parte. A esas medidas que organizan la lucha de clases global, quienes



de veras mandan añaden otras por las que regularmente dominan a sus socios periféricos. Consisten estas en darles “luz verde” en la corrupción y la represión, una corrupción y represión de las que se benefician en grande las metrópolis y que la banca mundial oculta, cuando en realidad son ellas y ella quienes hacen del narcotráfico y el terrorismo uno de los principales negocios del “enlace globalizador” de las corporaciones financieras, armamentistas, mineras, agroindustriales, constructoras, y de los variados servicios que les dan para la construcción de infraestructuras y meganegocios en las ciudades y territorios de la periferia, al tiempo que los gobiernos nativos adquieren cuantiosas deudas interiores-exteriores, que no destinan al desarrollo del país, sino a la importación de materiales y productos que los prestamistas producen y de que se deshacen en ventas negociadas para el descomunal enriquecimiento y la buena marcha de las corporaciones y sus deudores.

La creciente deuda externa no se emplea así para adquirir bienes de producción que les hagan competencia en medio de la crisis sino para la adquisición de bienes de consumo que las corporaciones no tienen a quien vender.

A tan nuevas y renovadas medidas se añade otra más que es importante señalar y es la que concierne a la organización global de la lucha de clases, que corresponde a la impresionante novedad de los llamados “golpes de Estado blandos” aplicados sobre todo contra los llamados “gobiernos progresistas” o “de izquierda”.

En la lucha global de clases se usan, con beneficios sin cuento, los vínculos entre el crimen organizado y el gobierno local, asesorado e informado este por el gobierno global y apoyados abiertamente por las burguesías nacionales. En la lucha se combinan las guerras “internas”, reales, con las virtuales, con o sin uso de los militares, y mediante la combinación de la inflación con el desabasto, de la publicidad y la propaganda con los agentes provocadores...

La novedad prevaleciente se basa en el uso de las contradicciones de clase de pueblos y trabajadores que tiran a los gobiernos progresistas con el apoyo del poder legislativo y el judicial y a veces con el del segundón en el poder ejecutivo, todo en medio de un ejército que defiende el orden legal existente. La globalización es otro imperialismo, muy otro, en occidente y también en oriente; en el neoliberalismo de aquí y en el estatismo no menos sofisticado de allá.

En cuanto a los gobiernos que luchan eficaz y eficientemente en las redes de los socios comprometidos y leales, la globalización neoliberal apoya su fidelidad siempre que le den más y más de lo que les piden o que no incurran en desobediencias. En ambos casos se les amenaza con denunciarlos y, si es necesario, cuando ya no le sirven, las propias corporaciones y complejos apoyan las denuncias de latrocinios y crímenes, y les aplican los calificativos de “gobiernos fallidos” o de “gobiernos canallas”. Así es el arte de gobernar

“eficientemente”, así se ejerce una llamada “democracia” que ha sido privatizada por las grandes corporaciones y utilizada por clase política para ocupar puestos jugosos de elección popular y disponer de las ventajas y concesiones de que se sirven sus jefes políticos y clientelas.

En México el sistema político, con sus sindicatos y organizaciones del antiguo sector popular, obrero y agrario actúa en un mundo fantasmagórico en que las mutuas acusaciones de corrupción o violencia criminal, individual y colectiva, generalmente son inconsecuentes, y “allí quedan” -en meras denuncias-; mientras los partidos políticos, a más de sus luchas internas y de sus alianzas desideologizadas entre los que se dicen de derecha o de izquierda, más que presentar y defender un programa alternativo socialdemócrata, o reformista, o que retome como programa la Constitución que ya se deshizo, se dedican a acusaciones personales de latrocinios, crímenes, y flaquezas, con un agravante más: Que cuando presentan un programa para la solución de los problemas nacionales y sociales, su candidatos, una vez elegidos casi siempre se olvidan de las promesas, y muestran, con variados tonos, su pobre y elocuente deterioro moral.

En medio de tan grave situación se dan dos circunstancias a nivel mundial que hacen cada vez más necesaria la organización de los pueblos y los trabajadores: La amenaza a la vida en la tierra si el capitalismo subsiste, y el horror sistémico que vive la humanidad con la actual organización del trabajo y de la vida.

Para la solución de todos esos problemas y para el establecimiento de una democracia desde abajo y con los de abajo, el papel de los trabajadores va a ser crucial y a su presencia como actores fundamentales de la emancipación quiero dedicar unas palabras finales, a reserva de referirme en otra ocasión al reciente Congreso Nacional Indígena y del EZLN con su extraordinario acuerdo de consultar a sus comunidades sobre la posibilidad de librar la lucha electoral con todos los mexicanos que se sumen al proceso emancipador, y que para ello funden el poder del pueblo mexicano. Los trabajadores cumplirán en este y en todos los proyectos emancipadores un papel fundamental para su organización y éxito.

De hecho, todos los problemas referidos incluyen la presencia activa de los trabajadores en su sentido más amplio, que es el correcto y, al mismo tiempo hay otros problemas que directamente les conciernen y de que me gustaría hablar, así como, de los retos que se les presentan para una organización y una lucha que pueda hacer el pueblo trabajador, uno de los actores que con sus vanguardias construya la democracia, es decir, la soberanía del pueblo sobre la de monarcas, oligarquías, burocracias y corporaciones.

La crisis está afectando en el mundo y en nuestro país a los trabajadores como a la inmensa mayoría de los seres humanos y amenaza con afectarlos como a todos los seres vivos y al planeta Tierra. Esto es científicamente exacto. Pero por lo que se refiere a los trabajadores,

algunos datos y cifras pueden ser muy ilustrativos, y son esenciales para darnos cuenta de la urgente tarea de organizarnos y de las mejores formas de hacerlo.

Empleo un estilo telegráfico para dar cuenta de algunos. Según la Organización Internacional del Trabajo 25 millones de personas son víctimas de trabajo forzado. Según la *Walk Free Foundation* el número de esclavos en México es de 376 mil 800 personas. Los peligros de desempleo por la robotización y el uso de nuevas tecnologías y de “sistemas inteligentes” varían en las distintas regiones y en una misma región. El riesgo de la automatización del trabajo en los países de la OCDE alcanza 9%. Parece estar subestimado...

Una investigación de la Universidad de Oxford calcula que los trabajos en alto riesgo de perderse alcanzan al 47% en Estados Unidos. En todos estos casos se habla de trabajos que pueden ser automatizados en una década o dos. La mayoría corresponde a transportes, labores de producción y también de trabajo administrativo y de oficina. Otra amenaza más se refiere a los desplazados por la violencia, que según el Consejo Noruego para refugiados en México llegan por lo menos a 281 mil 400 internos con unos que son masivos -es decir de 10 o más familias-, y en que destacaron 15 estados.

De 2007 a 2011 se estima que pasaron a Estados Unidos 115 mil personas de las 254 mil que querían entrar sólo desde Ciudad Juárez.

Como la ayuda a los campesinos ha sido totalmente abandonada de acuerdo con la política neoliberal globalizadora, 11 millones 300 mil mexicanos se encuentran en la extrema miseria, cifra proporcionada por Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, el Coneval. Entre trabajadores, periodistas, estudiantes, líderes comunales y muchos otros, como víctimas se registran más de 100 mil homicidios intencionales de 2006 a 2012, según el Informe Especial de la ONU sobre ejecuciones extrajudiciales, sumarias o arbitrarias.

Según cifras estimadas de organizaciones de la sociedad civil el promedio anual de migrantes indocumentados que ingresa a México puede llegar a 400 mil. Y hay migrantes que llegan de Asia, África, el Caribe y Sudamérica, que tratan de pasar a Estados Unidos como indocumentados por ciudades del este y el oeste. La emigración actual es inmensa; la del futuro tiende a ser mayor.

No puede uno ignorar que todos estos datos son muy “incómodos” para los ricos y los poderosos y para quienes los encubren y ensalzan, o simplemente, no quieren oír nada del mundo desagradable. Pero son muy importantes para quienes creemos que otro mundo es posible y luchamos poco o mucho para que hasta lo que parece imposible sea posible como decía aquél letrado del 68. Y querríamos terminar este recuento refiriéndonos a los jóvenes

que son quienes van a vivir en el futuro inmediato como trabajadores manuales e intelectuales. Sobre todos en ellos pesa el peligro de la privatización de escuelas y universidades.

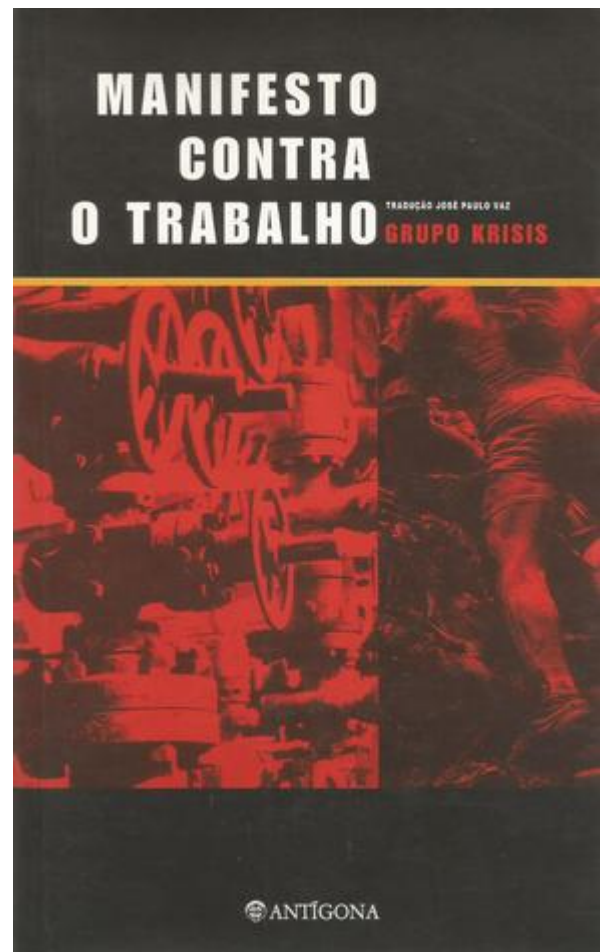
Al conflicto magisterial que la llamada reforma educativa alentó se añaden crecientes daños y amenazas a las escuelas y universidades públicas. En ambos niveles, niñez y juventud viven problemas que parecen identificarse con una política expresa -y no sólo indirecta- de desarrollo del subdesarrollo. No debemos nada más enfrentar esa política sino acrecentar las fuerzas de pueblos y trabajadores y de las organizaciones que con ellos y para ellos luchan por otra organización del trabajo y de la vida.

Ser trabajador es ser obrero, campesino, empleado, profesor, ingeniero, médico, abogado, y profesionista en el uso de las manos y la inteligencia. Si en los trabajadores productivos se encontró por la teoría crítica al protagonista de la emancipación, la historia fue mostrando varios hechos significativos que es necesario llevar a la conciencia y a la acción. Uno de ellos es que a los trabajadores de la producción industrial se tienen que añadir hoy los de la agricultura, los de las comunidades, los desplazados, los sin papeles y también los de la distribución, los transportes y servicios, así como los trabajadores que viniendo de las clases subalternas y de los sectores medios viven en carne propia y en su conciencia, la irracionalidad de un sistema dominado por quienes están enfermos de poder, utilidades y riquezas, a tal grado que se ocultan el estado universal de barbarie y de inmoralidad que el sistema dominante impone, amenazando hoy la existencia de la propia vida de sus beneficiarios y la de sus descendientes, hechos todos que no son producto de mentes deprimidas a las que acusan de catastrofistas, sino de quienes, junto con los pueblos y los trabajadores organizados en su moral de lucha y de cooperación, lidiaremos y venceremos.

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## Krisis Group: Manifesto Against Labour

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## 1. The rule of dead labour

A corpse rules society – the corpse of labour. All powers around the globe formed an alliance to defend its rule: the Pope and the World Bank, Tony Blair and Jörg Haider, trade unions and entrepreneurs, German ecologists and French socialists. They don't know but one slogan: jobs, jobs, jobs!

Whoever still has not forgotten what reflection is all about, will easily realise the implausibility of such an attitude. The society ruled by labour does not experience any temporary crisis; it encounters its absolute limit. In the wake of the micro-electronic revolution, wealth production increasingly became independent from the actual expenditure of human labour power to an extent quite recently only imaginable in science fiction. No one can seriously maintain any longer that this process can be halted or reversed. Selling the commodity labour power in the 21st century is as promising as the sale of stagecoaches has proved to be in the 20th century. However, whoever is not able to sell his or her labour power in this society is considered to be „superfluous“ and will be disposed of on the social waste dump.

Those who do not work (labour) shall not eat! This cynical principle is still in effect; all the

more nowadays when it becomes hopelessly obsolete. It is really an absurdity: Never before the society was that much a labour society as it is now when labour itself is made superfluous. On its deathbed labour turns out to be a totalitarian power that does not tolerate any gods besides itself. Seeping through the pores of everyday life into the psyche, labour controls both thought and action. No expense or pain is spared to artificially prolong the lifespan of the „labour idol“. The paranoid cry for jobs justifies the devastation of natural resources on an intensified scale even if the destructive effect for humanity was realised a long time ago. The very last obstacles to the full commercialisation of any social relationship may be cleared away uncritically, if only there is a chance for a few miserable jobs to be created. „Any job is better than no job“ became a confession of faith, which is exacted from everybody nowadays.

The more it becomes obvious that the labour society is nearing its end, the more forcefully this realisation is being repressed in public awareness. The methods of repression may be different, but can be reduced to a common denominator. The globally evident fact that labour proves to be a self-destructive end-in-itself is stubbornly redefined into the individual or collective failure of individuals, companies, or even entire regions as if the world is under the control of a universal *idée fixe*. The objective structural barrier of labour has to appear as the subjective problem of those who were already ousted.

To some people unemployment is the result of exaggerated demands, low-performance or missing flexibility, to others unemployment is due to the incompetence, corruption, or greed of „their“ politicians or business executives, let alone the inclination of such „leaders“ to pursue policies of „treachery“. In the end all agree with Roman Herzog, the ex-president of Germany, who said that „all over the country everybody has to pull together“ as if the problem was about the motivation of, let us say, a football team or a political sect. Everybody shall keep his or her nose to the grindstone even if the grindstone got pulverised. The gloomy meta-message of such incentives cannot be misunderstood: Those who fail in finding favour in the eyes of the „labour idol“ have to take the blame, can be written off and pushed away.

Such a law on how and when to sacrifice humans is valid all over the world. One country after the other gets broken under the wheel of economic totalitarianism, thereby giving evidence for the one and only „truth“: The country has violated the so-called „laws of the market economy“. The logic of profitability will punish any country that does not adapt itself to the blind working of total competition unconditionally and without regard to the consequences. The great white hope of today is the business rubbish of tomorrow. The raging economical psychotics won't get shaken in their bizarre worldview, though. Meanwhile, three quarters of the global population were more or less declared to be social litter. One capitalist centre after the other is dashed to pieces. After the breakdown of the developing countries and after the failure of the state capitalist squad of the global labour

society, the East Asian model pupils of market economy have vanished into limbo. Even in Europe, social panic is spreading. However, the Don Quichotes in politics and management even more grimly continue to crusade in the name of the „labour idol“.

*Everyone must be able to live from his work is the propounded principle. Hence that one can live is subject to a condition and there is no right where the qualification can not be fulfilled.*

Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Law according to the Principles of Scientific Theory*, 1797

## **2. The neo-liberal apartheid society**

Should the successful sale of the commodity „labour power“ become the exception instead of the rule, a society devoted to the irrational abstraction of labour is inevitably doomed to develop a tendency for social apartheid. All factions of the comprehensive all-parties consensus on labour, so to say the labour-camp, on the quiet accepted this logic long ago and even took over a strictly supporting role. There is no controversy on whether ever increasing sections of the population shall be pushed to the margin and shall be excluded from social participation; there is only controversy on how this social selection is to be pushed through.

The neo-liberal faction trustfully leaves this dirty social-Darwinist business to the „invisible hand“ of the markets. This conception is utilised to justify the dismantling of the welfare state, ostracising those who can no longer keep abreast in the rat race of competition. Only those who belong to the smirking brotherhood of globalisation winners are awarded the quality of being a human. It goes without saying that the capitalist end-in-itself may claim any natural resources of the planet. When they can no longer be profitably mobilised, they have to lie fallow even if entire populations go hungry.

The police, salvation sects, the Mafia, and charity organisations become responsible for that annoying human litter. In the USA and most of the central European countries, more people are imprisoned than in any average military dictatorship. In Latin America, day after day an

ever-larger number of street urchins and other poor are hunted down by free enterprise death-squads than dissidents were killed during the worst periods of political repression. There is only one social function left for the ostracised: to be the warning example. Their fate is meant to goad on those who still participate in the rat race of fighting for the leftovers. And even the losers have to be kept in hectic moving so that they don't hit on the idea to of rebelling against the outrageous impositions they face.

Nevertheless, even at the price of self-annihilation, for most people the brave new world of the totalitarian market economy will only provide for a live in shadow as shadow-humans in a „shady“ economy. As low-wage-slaves and democratic serfs of the „service society, they will have to fawn on the well-off winners of globalisation. The modern „working poor“ may shine the shoes of the last businessmen of the dying labour society, may sell contaminated hamburgers to them, or may join the Security Corps to guard their shopping malls. Those who left behind their brain on the coat rack may dream of working their way up to the position of a service industry millionaire.

In Anglo-Saxon countries this horror scenario is reality meanwhile as it is in Third World countries and Eastern Europe; and Euroland is determined to catch up in rapid strides. The relevant financial papers make no secret of how they imagine the future of labour. The children in Third World countries who wash windscreens at polluted crossroads are depicted as the shining example of „entrepreneurial initiative“ and shall serve as a role model for the jobless in the respective local „service desert“. „The role model for the future is the individual as the entrepreneur of his own labour power, being provident and solely responsible for all his own life“ says the „Commission on future social questions of the free states of Bavaria and Saxony“. In addition: „There will be stronger demand for ordinary person-related services, if the services rendered become cheaper, i.e. if the „service provider“ will earn lower wages“. In a society of human „self-respect“, such a statement would trigger off social revolt. However, in a world of domesticated workhorses, it will only engender a helpless nod.

*The crook has destroyed working and taken away the worker's wage even so. Now he [the worker] shall labour without a wage while picturing to himself the blessing of success and profit in his prison cell. [...] By means of forced labour he shall be trained to perform moral labour as a free*



*personal act.*

Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Die deutsche Arbeit (The German Labour)*, 1861

### **3. The neo-welfare-apartheid-state**

The anti-neoliberal faction of the socially all-embracing labour camp cannot bring itself to the liking of such a perspective. On the other hand, they are deeply convinced that a human being that has no job is not a human being at all. Nostalgically fixated on the postwar era of mass employment, they are bound to the idea of reviving the labour society. The state administration shall fix what the markets are incapable of. The purported normality of a labour society is to be simulated by means of job programmes, municipally organised compulsory labour for people on dole or welfare, subsidies, public debt, and other policies of this sort. This half-hearted rehash of a state-regulated labour camp has no chance at all, but remains to be the ideological point of departure for broad strata of the population who are already on the brink of disaster. Doomed to fail, such steps put into practice are anything else but emancipatory.

The ideological transformation of „scarce labour“ (tight labour market) into a prime civil right necessarily excludes all foreigners. The social logic of selection then is not questioned, but redefined: The individual struggle for survival shall be defused by means of ethnic-nationalistic criteria. „Domestic treadmills only for native citizens“ is the outcry deep from the bottom of the people's soul, who are suddenly able to combine motivated by their perverse lust for labour. Right-wing populism makes no secret of such sentiment. Its criticism of „rival society“ only amounts to ethnic cleansing within the shrinking zones of capitalist wealth.

Whereas the moderate nationalism of social democrats or Greens is set on treating the old-established immigrants like natives and can even imagine naturalising those people should they be able to prove themselves harmless and affable. Thereby the intensified exclusion of refugees from the Eastern and African world can be legitimised in a populist manner even better and without getting into a fuss. Of course, the whole operation is well obscured by talking nineteen to the dozen about humanity and civilisation. Manhunts for „illegal immigrants“ allegedly sneaking in domestic jobs shall not leave behind nasty bloodstains or burn marks on German soil. Rather it is the business of the border police, police forces in general, and the buffer states of „Schengenland“, which dispose of the problem lawfully and best of all far away from media coverage.

The state-run labour-simulation is violent and repressive by birth. It stands for the absolute will to maintain the rule of the „labour idol“ by all means; even after its decease. This labour-bureaucratic fanaticism will not grant peace to those who resorted to the very last hideouts of a welfare state already fallen into ruins, i.e. to the ousted, jobless, or non-competitive, let alone to those refusing to labour for good reasons. Welfare workers and employment agents will haul them before the official interrogation commissions, forcing them to kow-tow before the throne of the ruling corpse.

Usually the accused is given the benefit of doubt, but here the burden of proof is shifted. Should the ostracised not want to live on air and Christian charity for their further lives, they have to accept whatsoever dirty and slave work, or any other absurd „occupational therapy“ cooked up by job creation schemes, just to demonstrate their unconditional readiness for labour. Whether such job has rhyme or reason, not to mention any meaning, or is simply the realisation of pure absurdity, does not matter at all. The main point is that the jobless are kept moving to remind them incessantly of the one and only law governing their existence on earth.

In the old days people worked to earn money. Nowadays the government spares no expenses to simulate the labour-„paradise“ lost for some hundred thousand people by launching bizarre „job training schemes“ or setting up „training companies“ in order to make them fit for „regular“ jobs they will never get. Ever newer and sillier steps are taken to keep up the appearance that the idle running social treadmills can be kept in full swing to the end of time. The more absurd the social constraint of „labour“ becomes, the more brutally it is hammered into the peoples' head that they cannot even get a piece of bread for free.

In this respect „New Labour“ and its imitators all over the world concur with the neo-liberal scheme of social selection. In simulating jobs and holding out beguiling prospects of a wonderful future for the labour society, a firm moral legitimacy is created to crack down on the jobless and labour objectors more fiercely. At the same time compulsory labour, subsidised wages, and so-called „honorary citizen activity“ bring down labour cost, entailing a massively inflated low-wage sector and an increase in other lousy jobs of that sort.

The so-called activating workfare does even not spare persons who suffer from chronic disease or single mothers with little children. Recipients of social benefits are released from this administrative stranglehold only as soon as the nameplate is tied to their toe (i.e. in mortuary). The only reason for such state-obtrusiveness is to discourage as many people as possible from claiming benefits at all by displaying dreadful instruments of torture – any miserable job must appear comparatively pleasant.

Officially the paternalist state always only swings the whip out of love and with the intention

of sternly training its children, denounced as „work-shy“, to be tough in the name of their better progress. In fact, the pedagogical measures only have the goal to drum the wards out. What else is the idea of conscripting unemployed people and forcing them to go to the fields to harvest asparagus (in Germany)? It is meant to push out the Polish seasonal workers, who accept slave wages only because the exchange rate turns the pittance they get into an acceptable income at home. Forced labourers are neither helped nor given any „vocational perspective“ with this measure. Even for the asparagus growers, the disgruntled academics and reluctant skilled workers, favoured to them as a present, are nothing but a nuisance. When, after a twelve-hour day, the foolish idea of setting up a hot-dog stand as an act of desperation suddenly appears in a more friendly light, the „aid to flexibility“ has its desired neo-British effect.

*Any job is better than no job.*

Bill Clinton, 1998

*No job is as hard as no job.*

*A poster at the December 1998 rally, organised by initiatives  
for unemployed people*

*Citizen work should be rewarded, not paid. [...] Whoever  
does honorary citizen work clears himself of the stigma of  
being unemployed and being a recipient of welfare benefits.*

Ulrich Beck, *The Soul of Democracy*, 1997

#### **4. Exaggeration and denial of the labour religion**

The new fanaticism for labour with which this society reacts to the death of its idol is the logical continuation and final stage of a long history. Since the days of the Reformation, all the powers of Western modernisation have preached the sacredness of work. Over the last 150 years, all social theories and political schools were possessed by the idea of labour. Socialists and conservatives, democrats and fascists fought each other to the death, but despite all deadly hatred, they always paid homage to the labour idol together. „Push the

idler aside“, is a line from the German lyrics of the international working (labouring) class anthem; „labour makes free“ it resounds eerily from the inscription above the gate in Auschwitz. The pluralist post-war democracies all the more swore by the everlasting dictatorship of labour. Even the constitution of the ultra-catholic state of Bavaria lectures its citizens in the Lutheran tradition: „Labour is the source of a people’s prosperity and is subject to the special protective custody of the state“. At the end of the 20th century, all ideological differences have vanished into thin air. What remains is the common ground of a merciless dogma: Labour is the natural destiny of human beings.

Today the reality of the labour society itself denies that dogma. The disciples of the labour religion have always preached that a human being, according to its supposed nature, is an „animal laborans“ (working creature/animal). Such an „animal“ actually only assumes the quality of being a human by subjecting matter to his will and in realising himself in his products, as once did Prometheus. The modern production process has always made a mockery of this myth of a world conqueror and a demigod, but might have had a real substratum in the era of inventor capitalists like Siemens or Edison and their skilled workforce. Meanwhile, however, such airs and graces became completely absurd.

Whoever asks about the content, meaning, and goal of his or her job, will go crazy or becomes a disruptive element in the social machinery designed to function as an end-in-itself. „Homo faber“, once full of conceit as to his craft and trade, a type of human who took seriously what he did in a parochial way, has become as old-fashioned as a mechanical typewriter. The treadmill has to run at all cost, and „that’s all there is to it“. Advertising departments and armies of entertainers, company psychologists, image advisors and drug dealers are responsible for creating meaning. Where there is continual babble about motivation and creativity, there is not a trace left of either of them – save self-deception. This is why talents such as autosuggestion, self-projection and competence simulation rank among the most important virtues of managers and skilled workers, media stars and accountants, teachers and parking lot guards.

The crisis of the labour society has completely ridiculed the claim that labour is an eternal necessity imposed on humanity by nature. For centuries it was preached that homage has to be paid to the labour idol just for the simple reason that needs can not be satisfied without humans sweating blood: To satisfy needs, that is the whole point of the human labour camp existence. If that were true, a critique of labour would be as rational as a critique of gravity. So how can a true „law of nature“ enter into a state of crisis or even disappear? The floor leaders of the society’s labour camp factions, from neo-liberal gluttons for caviar to labour unionist beer bellies, find themselves running out of arguments to prove the pseudo-nature of labour. Or how can they explain that three-quarters of humanity are sinking in misery and poverty only because the labour system no longer needs their labour?

It is not the curse of the Old Testament „In the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread“ that is to burden the ostracised any longer, but a new and inexorable condemnation: „You shall not eat because your sweat is superfluous and unmarketable“. That is supposed to be a law of nature? This condemnation is nothing but an irrational social principle, which assumes the appearance of a natural compulsion because it has destroyed or subjugated any other form of social relations over the past centuries and has declared itself to be absolute. It is the „natural law“ of a society that regards itself as very „rational“, but in truth only follows the instrumental rationality of its labour idol for whose „factual inevitabilities“ (Sachzwänge) it is ready to sacrifice the last remnant of its humanity.

*Work, however base and mammonist, is always connected with nature. The desire to do work leads more and more to the truth and to the laws and prescriptions of nature, which are truths.*

Thomas Carlyle, *Working and not Despairing*, 1843

## **5. Labour is a coercive social principle**

Labour is in no way identical with humans transforming nature (matter) and interacting with each other. As long as mankind exist, they will build houses, produce clothing, food and many other things. They will raise children, write books, discuss, cultivate gardens, and make music and much more. This is banal and self-evident. However, the raising of human activity as such, the pure „expenditure of labour power“, to an abstract principle governing social relations without regard to its content and independent of the needs and will of the participants, is not self-evident.

In ancient agrarian societies, there were all sorts of domination and personal dependencies, but not a dictatorship of the abstraction labour. Activities in the transformation of nature and in social relations were in no way self-determined, but were hardly subject to an abstract „expenditure of labour power“. Rather, they were embedded in complex rules of religious prescriptions and in social and cultural traditions with mutual obligations. Every activity had its own time and scene; simply there was no abstract general form of activity.

It fell to the modern commodity producing system as an end-in-itself with its ceaseless

transformation of human energy into money to bring about a separated sphere of so-called labour „alienated“ from all other social relations and abstracted from all content. It is a sphere demanding of its inmates unconditional surrender, life-to-rule, dependent robotic activity severed from any other social context, and obedience to an abstract „economic“ instrumental rationality beyond human needs. In this sphere detached from life, time ceases to be lived and experienced time; rather time becomes a mere raw material to be exploited optimally: „time is money“. Any second of life is charged to a time account, every trip to the loo is an offence, and every gossip is a crime against the production goal that has made itself independent. Where labour is going on, only abstract energy may be spent. Life takes place elsewhere - or nowhere, because labour beats the time round the clock. Even children are drilled to obey Newtonian time to become „effective“ members of the workforce in their future life. Leave of absence is granted merely to restore an individual's „labour power“. When having a meal, celebrating or making love, the second hand is ticking at the back of one's mind.

In the sphere of labour it does not matter what is being done, it is the act of doing itself that counts. Above all, labour is an end-in-itself especially in the respect that it is the raw material and substance of monetary capital yields - the limitless dynamic of capital as self-valorising value. Labour is nothing but the „liquid (motion) aggregate“ of this absurd end-in-itself. That's why all products must be produced as commodities - and not for any practical reason. Only in commodity form products can „solidify“ the abstraction money, whose essence is the abstraction labour. Such is the mechanism of the alienated social treadmill holding captive modern humanity.

For this reason, it doesn't matter what is being produced as well as what use is made of it - not to mention the indifference to social and environmental consequences. Whether houses are built or landmines are produced, whether books are printed or genetically modified tomatoes are grown, whether people fall sick as a result, whether the air gets polluted or „only“ good taste goes to the dogs - all this is irrelevant as long as, whatever it takes, commodities can be transformed into money and money into fresh labour. The fact that any commodity demands a concrete use, and should it be a destructive one, has no relevance for the economic rationality for which the product is nothing but a carrier of once expended labour, or „dead labour“.

The accumulation of „dead labour“, in other words „capital“, materialising in the money form is the only „meaning“ the modern commodity producing system knows about. What is „dead labour“? A metaphysical madness! Yes, but a metaphysics that has become concrete reality, a „reified“ madness that holds this society in its iron grip. In perpetual buying and selling, people don't interact as self-reliant social beings, but only execute the presupposed end-in-itself as social automatons.

*The worker (lit. labourer) feels to be himself outside work and feels outside himself when working. He is at home when he does not work. When he works, he is not at home. As a result, his work is forced labour, not voluntary labour. Forced labour is not the satisfaction of a need but only a means for satisfying needs outside labour. Its foreignness appears in that labour is avoided as a plague as soon as no physical or other force exists.*

Karl Marx, *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1844

## **6. Labour and capital are the two sides of the same coin**

The political left has always eagerly venerated labour. It has stylised labour to be the true nature of a human being and mystified it into the supposed counter-principle of capital. Not labour was regarded as a scandal, but its exploitation by capital. As a result, the programme of all „working class parties“ was always the „liberation of labour“ and not „liberation from labour“. Yet the social opposition of capital and labour is only the opposition of different (albeit unequally powerful) interests within the capitalist end-in-itself. Class struggle was the form of battling out opposite interests on the common social ground and reference system of the commodity-producing system. It was germane to the inner dynamics of capital accumulation. Whether the struggle was for higher wages, civil rights, better working conditions or more jobs, the all-embracing social treadmill with its irrational principles was always its implied presupposition.

From the standpoint of labour, the qualitative content of production counts as little as it does from the standpoint of capital. The only point of interest is selling labour power at best price. The idea of determining aim and object of human activity by joint decision is beyond the imagination of the treadmill inmates. If the hope ever existed that such self-determination of social reproduction could be realised in the forms of the commodity-producing system, the „workforce“ has long forgotten about this illusion. Only „employment“ or „occupation“ is a matter of concern; the connotations of these terms speak volumes about the end-in-itself character of the whole arrangement and the state of mental

immaturity of the participants comes to light.

What is being produced and to what end, and what might be the consequences neither matters to the seller of the commodity labour power nor to its buyer. The workers of nuclear power plants and chemical factories protest the loudest when their ticking time bombs are deactivated. The „employees“ of Volkswagen, Ford or Toyota are the most fanatical disciples of the automobile suicide programme, not merely because they are compelled to sell themselves for a living wage, but because they actually identify with their parochial existence. Sociologists, unionists, pastors and other „professional theologians“ of the „social question“ regard this as a proof for the ethical-moral value of labour. „Labour shapes personality“, they say. Yes, the personalities of zombies of the commodity production who can no longer imagine a life outside of their dearly loved treadmills, for which they drill themselves hard – day in, day out.

As the working class was hardly ever the antagonistic contradiction to capital or the historical subject of human emancipation, capitalists and managers hardly control society by means of the malevolence of some „subjective will of exploitation“. No ruling caste in history has led such a wretched life as a „bondman“ as the harassed managers of Microsoft, Daimler-Chrysler or Sony. Any medieval baron would have deeply despised these people. While he was devoted to leisure and squandered wealth orgiastically, the elite of the labour society does not allow itself any pause. Outside the treadmills, they don't know anything else but to become childish. Leisure, delight in cognition, realisation and discovery, as well as sensual pleasures, are as foreign to them as to their human „resource“. They are only the slaves of the labour idol, mere functional executives of the irrational social end-in-itself.

The ruling idol knows how to enforce its „subjectless“ (Marx) will by means of the „silent (implied) compulsion“ of competition to which even the powerful must bow, especially if they manage hundreds of factories and shift billions across the globe. If they don't „do business“, they will be scrapped as ruthlessly as the superfluous „labour force“. Kept in the leading strings of intransigent systemic constraints they become a public menace by this and not because of some conscious will to exploit others. Least of all, are they allowed to ask about the meaning and consequences of their restless action and can not afford emotions or compassion. Therefore they call it realism when they devastate the world, disfigure urban features, and only shrug their shoulders when their fellow beings are impoverished in the midst of affluence.

*More and more labour has the good conscience on its side:*



*The inclination for leisure is called „need of recovery“ and begins to feel ashamed of itself. „It is just for the sake of health“, they defend themselves when caught at a country outing. It could happen to be in the near future that succumbing to a „vita contemplativa“ (i.e. to go for a stroll together with friends to contemplate life) will lead to self-contempt and a guilty conscience.*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Leisure and Idleness*, 1882

## **7. Labour is patriarchal rule**

It is not possible to subject every sphere of social life or all essential human activities to the rule of abstract (Newtonian) time, even if the intrinsic logic of labour, inclusive of the transformation of the latter into „money-substance“, insists on it. Consequently, alongside the „separated“ sphere of labour, so to say at the rear, the sphere of home life, family life, and intimacy came into being.

It is a sphere that conveys the idea of femininity and comprises the various activities of everyday life which can only rarely be transformed into monetary remuneration: from cleaning, cooking, child rearing, and the care for the elderly, to the „labour of love“ provided by the ideal housewife, who busies herself with „loving“ care for her exhausted breadwinner and refuels his emptiness with well measured doses of emotion. That is why the sphere of intimacy, which is nothing but the reverse side of the labour sphere, is idealised as the sanctuary of true life by bourgeois ideology, even if in reality it is most often a familiarity hell. In fact, it is not a sphere of better or true life, but a parochial and reduced form of existence, a mere mirror-inversion subject to the very same systemic constraints (i.e. labour). The sphere of intimacy is an offshoot of the labour sphere, cut off and in its own meanwhile, but bound to the overriding common reference system. Without the social sphere of „female labour“, the labour society would actually never have worked. The „female sphere“ is the implied precondition of the labour society and at the same time its specific result.

The same applies to the gender stereotypes being generalised in the course of the developing commodity-producing system. It was no accident that the image of the somewhat primitive, instinct-driven, irrational, and emotional woman solidified only along with the

image of the civilised, rational and self-restrained male workaholic and became a mass prejudice finally. It was also no accident that the self-drill of the white man, who went into some sort of mental boot camp training to cope with the exacting demands of labour and its pertinent human resource management, coincided with a brutal witch-hunt that raged for some centuries.

The modern understanding and appropriation of the world by means of (natural) scientific thought, a way of thinking that was gaining ground then, was contaminated by the social end-in-itself and its gender attributes down to the roots. This way, the white man, in order to ensure his smooth functioning, subjected himself to a self-exorcism of all evil spirits, namely those frames of mind and emotional needs, which are considered to be dysfunctional in the realms of labour.

In the 20th century, especially in the post-war democracies of Fordism, women were increasingly recruited to the labour system, which only resulted in some specific female schizophrenic mind. On the one hand, the advance of women into the sphere of labour has not led to their liberation, but subjected them to very same drill procedures for the labour idol as already suffered by men. On the other hand, as the systemic structure of „segregation“ was left untouched, the separated sphere of „female labour“ continued to exist extrinsic to what is officially deemed to be „labour“. This way, women were subjected to a double-burden and exposed to conflicting social imperatives. Within the sphere of labour - until now - they are predominantly confined to the low-wage sector and subordinate jobs.

No system-conforming struggle for quota regulations or equal career chances will change anything. The miserable bourgeois vision of a „compatibility of career and family“ leaves completely untouched the separation of the spheres of the commodity-producing system and thereby preserves the structure of gender segregation. For the majority of women such an outlook on life is unbearable, a minority of fat cats, however, may utilise the social conditions to attain a winner position within the social apartheid system by delegating housework and child care to poorly paid (and „obviously“ feminine) domestic servants.

Due to the systemic constraints of the labour society and its total usurpation of the individual in particular - entailing his or her unconditional surrender to the systemic logic, and mobility and obedience to the capitalist time regime - in society as a whole, the sacred bourgeois sphere of so-called private life and „holy family“ is eroded and degraded more and more. The patriarchy is not abolished, but runs wild in the unacknowledged crisis of the labour society. As the commodity-producing system gradually collapses at present, women are made responsible for survival in any respect, while the „masculine“ world indulges in the prolongation of the categories of the labour society by means of simulation.

*Mankind had to horribly mutilate itself to create its identical,  
functional, male self, and some of it has to be redone in  
everybody's childhood*

Max Horkheimer/Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of  
Enlightenment*

## **8. Labour is the service of humans in bondage**

The identity of labour and bondman existence can be shown factually and conceptually. Only a few centuries ago, people were quite aware of the connection between labour and social constraints. In most European languages, the term „labour“ originally referred only to the activities carried out by humans in bondage, i.e. bondmen, serfs, and slaves. In Germanic speaking areas, the word described the drudgery of an orphaned child fallen into serfdom. The Latin verb „laborare“ meant „staggering under a heavy burden“ and conveyed the suffering and toil of slaves. The Romance words „travail“, „trabajo“, etc., derive from the Latin „tripalium“, a kind of yoke used for the torture and punishment of slaves and other humans in bondage. A hint of that suffering is still discernible in the German idiom „to bend under the yoke of labour“.

Thus „labour“, according to its root, is not a synonym for self-determined human activity, but refers to an unfortunate social fate. It is the activity of those who have lost their freedom. The imposition of labour on all members of society is nothing but the generalisation of a life in bondage; and the modern worship of labour is merely the quasi-religious transfiguration of the actual social conditions.

For the individuals, however, it was possible to repress the conjunction between labour and bondage successfully and to internalise the social impositions because in the developing commodity-producing system, the generalisation of labour was accompanied by its reification: Most people are no longer under the thumb of a personal master. Human interdependence transformed into a social totality of abstract domination – discernible everywhere, but proving elusive. Where everyone has become a slave, everyone is simultaneously a master, that is to say a slaver of his own person and his very own slave driver and warder. All obey the opaque system idol, the „Big Brother“ of capital valorisation, who harnessed them to the „tripalium“.

## 9. The bloody history of labour

The history of the modern age is the history of the enforcement of labour, which brought devastation and horror to the planet in its trail. The imposition to waste the most of one's lifetime under abstract systemic orders was not always as internalised as today. Rather, it took several centuries of brute force and violence on a large scale to literally torture people into the unconditional service of the labour idol.

It did not start with some „innocent“ market expansion meant to increase „the wealth“ of his or her majesty's subjects, but with the insatiable hunger for money of the absolutist apparatus of state to finance the early modern military machinery. The development of urban merchant's and financial capital beyond traditional trade relations only accelerated through this apparatus, which brought the whole society in a bureaucratic stranglehold for the first time in history. Only this way did money become a central social motive and the abstraction of labour a central social constraint without regard to actual needs.

Most people didn't voluntarily go over to production for anonymous markets and thereby to a general cash economy, but were forced to do so because the absolutist hunger for money led to the levy of pecuniary and ever-increasing taxes, replacing traditional payment in kind. It was not that people had to „earn money“ for themselves, but for the militarised early modern firearm-state, its logistics, and its bureaucracy. This way the absurd end-in-itself of capital valorisation and thus of labour came into the world.

Only after a short time revenue became insufficient. The absolutist bureaucrats and finance capital administrators began to forcibly and directly organise people as the material of a „social machinery“ for the transformation of labour into money. The traditional way of life and existence of the population was vandalised as this population was earmarked to be the human material for the valorisation machine put on steam. Peasants and yeomen were driven from their fields by force of arms to clear space for sheep farming, which produced the raw material for the wool manufactories. Traditional rights like free hunting, fishing, and wood gathering in the forests were abolished. When the impoverished masses then marched through the land begging and stealing, they were locked up in workhouses and manufactories and abused with labour torture machines to beat the slave consciousness of a submissive serf into them. The floating rumour that people gave up their traditional life of their own accord to join the armies of labour on account of the beguiling prospects of labour society is a downright lie.

The gradual transformation of their subjects into material for the money-generating labour idol was not enough to satisfy the absolutist monster states. They extended their claim to other continents. Europe's inner colonisation was accompanied by outer colonisation, first in the Americas, then in parts of Africa. Here the whip masters of labour finally cast aside all

scruples. In an unprecedented crusade of looting, destruction and genocide, they assaulted the newly „discovered“ worlds – the victims overseas were not even considered to be human beings. However, the cannibalistic European powers of the dawning labour society defined the subjugated foreign cultures as „savages“ and cannibals.

This provided the justification to exterminate or enslave millions of them. Slavery in the colonial plantations and raw materials „industry“ – to an extent exceeding ancient slaveholding by far, was one of the founding crimes of the commodity-producing system. Here „extermination by means of labour“ was realised on a large scale for the first time. This was the second foundation crime of the labour society. The white man, already branded by the ravages of self-discipline, could compensate for his repressed self-hatred and inferiority complex by taking it out on the „savages“. Like „the woman“, indigenous people were deemed to be primitive halflings ranking in between animals and humans. It was Immanuel Kant's keen conjecture that baboons could talk if they only wanted and didn't speak because they feared being dragged off to labour.

Such grotesque reasoning casts a revealing light on the Enlightenment. The repressive labour ethos of the modern age, which in its original Protestant version relied on God's grace and since the Enlightenment on „Natural Law“, was disguised as a „civilising mission“. Civilisation in this sense means the voluntary submission to labour; and labour is male, white and „Western“. The opposite, the non-human, amorphous, and uncivilised nature, is female, coloured and „exotic“, and thus to be kept in bondage. In a word, the „universality“ of the labour society is perfectly racist by its origin. The universal abstraction of labour can always only define itself by demarcating itself from everything that can't be squared with its own categories.

The modern bourgeoisie, who ultimately inherited absolutism, is not a descendant of the peaceful merchants who once travelled the old trading routes. Rather it was the bunch of Condottieri, early modern mercenary gangs, poorhouse overseers, penitentiary wards, the whole lot of farmers general, slave drivers and other cut-throats of this sort, who prepared the social hotbed for modern „entrepreneurship“. The bourgeois revolutions of the 18th and 19th century had nothing to do with social emancipation. They only restructured the balance of power within the arising coercive system, separated the institutions of the labour society from the antiquated dynastic interests and pressed ahead with reification and depersonalization. It was the glorious French revolution that histrionically proclaimed compulsory labour, enacted a law on the „elimination of begging“ and arranged for new labour penitentiaries without delay.

This was the exact opposite of what was struggled for by rebellious social movements of a different character flaring up on the fringes of the bourgeois revolutions. Completely autonomous forms of resistance and disobedience existed long before, but the official

historiography of the modern labour society cannot make sense of it. The producers of the old agrarian societies, who never put up with feudal rule completely, were simply not willing to come to terms with the prospect of forming the working class of a system extrinsic to their life. An uninterrupted chain of events, from the peasants' revolts of the 15th and 16th century, the Luddite uprisings in Britain, later on denounced as the revolt of backwards fools, to the Silesian weavers' rebellion in 1844, gives evidence for the embittered resistance against labour. Over the last centuries, the enforcement of the labour society and the sometimes open and sometimes latent civil war were one and the same.

The old agrarian societies were anything but heaven on earth. However, the majority experienced the enormous constraints of the dawning labour society as a change to the worse and a „time of despair“. Despite of the narrowness of their existence, people actually had something to lose. What appears to be the darkness and plague of the misrepresented Middle Ages to the erroneous awareness of the modern times is in reality the horror of the history of modern age. The working hours of a modern white-collar or factory „employee“ are longer than the annual or daily time spent on social reproduction by any pre-capitalist or non-capitalist civilisation inside or outside Europe. Such traditional production was not devoted to efficiency, but was characterised by a culture of leisure and relative „slowness“. Apart from natural disasters, those societies were able to provide for the basic material needs of their members, in fact even better than it has been the case for long periods of modern history or is the case in the horror slums of the present world crisis. Furthermore, domination couldn't get that deep under the skin as in our thoroughly bureaucratised labour society.

This is why resistance against labour could only be smashed by military force. Even now, the ideologists of the labour society resort to cant to cover up that the civilisation of the pre-modern producers did not peacefully „evolve“ into a capitalist society, but was drowned in its own blood. The mellow labour democrats of today preferably shift the blame for all these atrocities onto the so-called „pre-democratic conditions“ of a past they have nothing to do with. They do not want to see that the terrorist history of the modern age is quite revealing as to nature of the contemporary labour society. The bureaucratic labour administration and state-run registration-mania and control freakery in industrial democracies has never been able to deny its absolutist and colonial origins. By means of ongoing reification to create an impersonal systemic context, the repressive human resource management, carried out in the name of the labour idol, has even intensified and meanwhile pervades all spheres of life. Due to today's agony of labour, the iron bureaucratic grip can be felt as it was felt in the early days of the labour society. Labour administration turns out to be a coercive system that has always organised social apartheid and seeks in vain to banish the crisis by means of democratic state slavery. At the same time, the evil colonial spirit returns to the countries at the periphery of capitalist „wealth“, „national economies“ that are already ruined by the dozen. This time, the International Monetary Fund assumes the position of an „official

receiver“ to bleed white the leftovers. After the decease of its idol, the labour society, still hoping for deliverance, falls back on the methods of its founding crimes, even though it is already beyond salvation.

*The barbarian is lazy and differs from the scholar by musing apathetically, since practical culture means to busy oneself out of habit and to feel a need for occupation.*

Georg W. F. Hegel, *General outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, 1821

*Actually one begins to feel [...] that this kind of labour is the best police conceivable, because it keeps a tight rein on everybody hindering effectively the evolution of sensibility, aspiration, and the desire for independence. For labour consumes nerve power to an extraordinary extent, depleting the latter as to contemplation, musing, dreaming, concern, love, hatred.*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Eulogists of Labour*, 1881

## **10. The working class movement was a movement for labour**

The historical working class movement, which did not rise until long after the fall of the old social revolts, did not longer struggle against the impositions of labour but developed an over-identification with the seemingly inevitable. The movement's focus was on workers' „rights“ and the amelioration of living conditions within the reference system of the labour society whose social constraints were largely internalised. Instead of radically criticising the transformation of human energy into money as an irrational end-in-itself, the workers' movement took the „standpoint of labour“ and understood capital valorisation as a neutral given fact.

Thus the workers' movement stepped into the shoes of absolutism, Protestantism and bourgeois Enlightenment. The misfortune of labour was converted into the false pride of labour, redefining the domestication the fully-fledged working class had went through for the purposes of the modern idol into a „human right“. The domesticated helots so to speak ideologically turned the tables and developed a missionary fervour to demand both the „right to work“ and a general „obligation to work“. They didn't fight the bourgeois in their capacity as the executives of the labour society but abused them, just the other way around, in the name of labour, by calling them parasites. Without exception, all members of the society should be forcibly recruited to the „armies of labour“.

The workers' movement itself became the pacemaker of the capitalist labour society, enforcing the last stages of reification within the labour system's development process and prevailing against the narrow-minded bourgeois officials of the 19th and early 20th century. It was a process quite similar to what had happened only 100 years before when the bourgeoisie stepped into the shoes of absolutism. This was only possible because the workers' parties and trade unions, due to their deification of labour, relied on the state machinery and its institutions of repressive labour management in an affirmative way. That's why it never occurred to them to abolish the state-run administration of human material and simultaneously the state itself. Instead of that, they were eager to seize the systemic power by means of what they called „the march through the institutions“ (in Germany). Thereby, like the bourgeoisie had done earlier, the workers' movement adopted the bureaucratic tradition of labour management and storekeeping of human resources, once conjured up by absolutism.

However, the ideology of a social generalisation of labour required a reconstruction of the political sphere. The system of estates with its differentiation as to political „rights“ (e.g. class system of franchise), being in force when the labour system was just halfway carried through, had to be replaced by the general democratic equality of the finalised „labour state“. Furthermore, any unevenness in the running of the valorisation machine, especially when felt as a harmful impact by society as whole, had to be balanced by welfare state intervention. In this respect, too, it was the workers' movement who brought forth the paradigm. Under the name „social democracy“ it became the ever largest „bourgeois action group“ in history, but got trapped in its own snare though. In a democracy anything may be subject to negotiation except for the intrinsic constraints of the labour society, which constitute the axiomatic preconditions implied. What can be on debate is confined to the modalities and the handling of those constraints. There is always only a choice between Coca-Cola and Pepsi, between pestilence and cholera, between impudence and dullness, between Kohl and Schröder.

The „democracy“ inherent in the labour society is the ever most perfidious system of domination in history – a system of self-oppression. That's why such a democracy never



organises its members free decision on how the available resources shall be utilised, but is only concerned with the constitution of the legal fabric forming the reference system for the socially segregated labour monads compelled to market themselves under the law of competition. Democracy is the exact opposite of freedom. As a consequence, the „labouring humans“ are necessarily divided into administrators and subjects of administration, employers and employees (in the true sense of the word), functional elite and human material. The inner structures of political parties, applying to labour parties in particular, are a true image of the prevailing social dynamic. Leaders and followers, celebrities and celebrators, nepotism-networks and opportunists: Those interrelated terms are producing evidence of the essence of a social structure that has nothing to do with free debate and free decision. It is a constituent part of the logic of the system that the elite itself is just a dependent functional element of the labour idol and its blind resolutions.

Ever since the Nazis seized power, any political party is a labour party and a capitalist party at the same time. In the „developing societies“ of the East and South, the labour parties mutated into parties of state terrorism to enable catch-up modernisation; in Western countries they became part of a system of „peoples‘ parties“ with exchangeable party manifestos and media representatives. Class struggle is all over because labour society’s time is up. As the labour society is passing away, „classes“ turn out to be mere functional categories of a common social fetish system. Whenever social democrats, Greens, and post-communists distinguish themselves by outlining exceptionally perfidious repression schemes, they prove to be nothing but the legitimate heirs of the workers‘ movement, which never wanted anything else but labour at all cost.

*Labour has to wield the sceptre,  
Serfdom shall be the idlers fate,  
Labour has to rule the world as  
Labour is the essence of the world.*

Friedrich Stampfer, *Der Arbeit Ehre (In Honour of Labour)*,  
1903

## 11. The crisis of labour

For a short historical moment after the Second World War, it seemed that the labour society, based on Fordistic industries, had consolidated into a system of „eternal prosperity“ pacifying the unbearable end-in-itself by means of mass consumption and welfare state amenities. Apart from the fact that this idea was always an idea of democratic helots – meant to become reality only for a small minority of world population, it has turned out to be foolish even in the capitalist centres. With the third industrial revolution of microelectronics, the labour society reached its absolute historical barrier.

That this barrier would be reached sooner or later was logically foreseeable. From birth, the commodity-producing system suffers from a fatal contradiction in terms. On the one hand, it lives on the massive intake of human energy generated by the expenditure of pure labour power – the more the better. On the other hand, the law of operational competition enforces a permanent increase in productivity bringing about the replacement of human labour power by scientific operational industrial capital.

This contradiction in terms was in fact the underlying cause for all of the earlier crises, among them the disastrous world economic crisis of 1929-33. Due to a mechanism of compensation, it was possible to get over those crises time and again. After a certain incubation period, then based on the higher level of productivity attained, the expansion of the market to fresh groups of buyers led to an intake of more labour power in absolute numbers than was previously rationalised away. Less labour power had to be spent per product, but more goods were produced absolutely to such an extent that this reduction was overcompensated. As long as product innovations exceeded process innovations, it was possible to transform the self-contradiction of the system into an expansion process.

The striking historical example is the automobile. Due to the assembly line and other techniques of „Taylorism“ („work-study expertise“), first introduced in Henry Ford's auto factory in Detroit, the necessary labour time per auto was reduced to a fraction. Simultaneously, the working process was enormously condensed, so that the human material was drained many times over the previous level in ratio to the same labour time interval. Above all, the car, up to then a luxury article for the upper ten thousand, could be made available to mass consumption due to the lower price.

This way the insatiable appetite of the labour idol for human energy was satisfied on a higher level despite rationalised assembly line production in the times of the second industrial revolution of „Fordism“. At the same time, the auto is a case in point for the destructive character of the highly developed mode of production and consumption in the labour society. In the interest of the mass production of cars and private car use on a huge scale, the landscape is being buried under concrete and the environment is being polluted.

And people have resigned to the undeclared 3rd world war raging on the roads and routes of this world – a war claiming millions of casualties, wounded and maimed year in, year out – by just shrugging it off.

The mechanism of compensation becomes defunct in the course of the 3rd industrial revolution of microelectronics. It is true that through microelectronics many products were reduced in price and new products were created (above all in the area of the media). However, for the first time, the speed of process innovation is greater than the speed of product innovation. More labour is rationalised away than can be reabsorbed by expansion of markets. As a logical consequence of rationalisation, electronic robotics replaces human energy or new communication technology makes labour superfluous, respectively. Entire sectors and departments of construction, production, marketing, warehousing, distribution, and management vanish into thin air. For the first time, the labour idol unintentionally confines itself to permanent hunger rations, thereby bringing about its very own death.

As the democratic labour society is a mature end-in-itself system of self-referential labour power expenditure, working like a feedback circuit, it is impossible to switch over to a general reduction in working hours within its forms. On the one hand, economic administrative rationality requires that an ever-increasing number of people become permanently „jobless“ and cut off from the reproduction of their life as inherent in the system. On the other hand, the constantly decreasing number of „employees“ is suffering from overworking and is subject to an even more intense efficiency pressure. In the midst of wealth, poverty and hunger are coming home to the capitalist centres. Production plants are shut down, and large parts of arable land lie fallow. A great number of homes and public buildings are vacant, whereas the number of homeless persons is on the increase. Capitalism becomes a global minority event.

In its distress, the dying labour idol has become auto-cannibalistic. In search of remaining labour „food“, capital breaks up the boundaries of national economy and globalises by means of nomadic cut-throat competition. Entire regions of the world are cut off from the global flows of capital and commodities. In an unprecedented wave of mergers and „hostile takeovers“, global players get ready for the final battle of private entrepreneurship. The disorganised states and nations implode, their populations, driven mad by the struggle for survival, attack each other in ethnic gang wars.

*The basic moral principle is the right of the person to his work. [...] For me there is nothing more detestable than an*

*idle life. None of us has a right to that. Civilisation has no room for idlers.*

Henry Ford

*Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth. [...] On the one side, then, it calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour time employed on it.*

*On the other side, it wants to use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value.*

Karl Marx, *Foundation of the Critique of Political Economy*,  
1857/8

## **12. The end of politics**

Necessarily the crisis of labour entails the crisis of state and politics. In principle, the modern state owes its career to the fact that the commodity producing system is in need of an overarching authority guaranteeing the general preconditions of competition, the general legal foundations, and the preconditions for the valorisation process – inclusive of a repression apparatus in case human material defaults the systemic imperatives and becomes insubordinate. Organising the masses in the form of bourgeois democracy, the state had to increasingly take on socio-economic functions in the 20th century. Its function is not limited to the provision of social services but comprises public health, transportation, communication and postal service, as well as infrastructures of all kind. The latter state-run or state-supervised services are essential for the working of the labour society, but cannot be organised as a private enterprise valorisation process; „privatised“ public services are

most often nothing but state consumption in disguise. The reason for that is that such infrastructure must be available for the society as a whole on a permanent basis and cannot follow the market cycles of supply and demand.

As the state is not a valorisation unit in its own and thus not able to transform labour into money, it has to skim off money from the actual valorisation process to finance its state functions. If the valorisation of value comes to a standstill, the coffers of state empty. The state, purported to be the social sovereign, proves to be completely dependent on the blindly raging, fetishised economy specific to the labour society. The state may pass as many bills as it wants, if the forces of production (the general powers of humanity) outgrow the system of labour, positive law, constituted and applicable only in relation to the subjects of labour, leads nowhere.

As a result of the ever-increasing mass unemployment, revenues from the taxation of earned income drain away. The social security net rips as soon as the number of „superfluous“ people constitutes a critical mass that has to be fed by the redistribution of monetary yields generated elsewhere in the capitalist system. However, with the rapid concentration process of capital in crisis, exceeding the boundaries of national economies, state revenues from the taxation of corporate profits drain away as well. The compulsions thereby exerted by transnational corporations on national economies, who are competing for foreign investment, result in tax dumping, dismantling of the welfare state, and the downgrading of environment protection standards. That is why the democratic state mutates into a mere crisis administrator.

The more the state approaches financial emergency, the more it is reduced to its repressive core. Infrastructures are cut down to proportions just meeting the requirements of transnational capital. As it was once the case in the colonies, social logistics are increasingly restricted to a few economic centres while the rest of the territory becomes wasteland. Whatever can be privatised is privatised, even if more and more people are excluded from the most essential supplies.

When the valorisation of value concentrates on only a few world market havens, a comprehensive supply system to satisfy the needs of the population as a whole does not matter any longer. Whether there is train service or postal service available is only relevant in respect to trade, industry, and financial markets. Education becomes the privilege of the globalisation winners. Intellectual, artistic, and theoretical culture is weighed against the criterion of marketability and fades away. A widening financing gap ruins public health service, giving rise to a class system of medical care. Surreptitiously and gradually at the beginning, eventually with callous candour, the law of social euthanasia is promulgated: Because you are poor and superfluous, you will have to die early.

In the fields of medicine, education, culture, and general infrastructure, knowledge, skill, techniques and methods along with the necessary equipment are available in abundance. However, pursuant to the „subject to sufficient funds“-clause – the latter objectifying the irrational law of the labour society – any of those capacities and capabilities has to be kept under lock and key, or has to be demobilised and scrapped. The same applies to the means of production in farming and industry as soon as they turn out to be „unprofitable“. Apart from the repressive labour simulation imposed on people by means of forced labour and low-wage regime along with the cutback of social security payments, the democratic state that already transformed into an apartheid system has nothing on offer for his ex-labour subjects. At a more advanced stage, the administration as such will disintegrate. The state apparatus will degenerate into a corrupt „kleptocracy“, the armed forces into Mafia-structured war gangs, and police forces into highwaymen.

No policy conceivable can stop this process or even reverse it. By its essence politics is related to social organisation in the form of state. When the foundations of the state-edifice crumble, politics and policies become baseless. Day after day, the left-wing democratic formula of the „political shaping“ (politische Gestaltung) of living conditions makes a fool of itself more and more. Apart from endless repression, the gradual elimination of civilisation, and support for the „terror of economy“, there is nothing left to „shape“. As the social end-in-itself specific to the labour society is an axiomatic presupposition of Western democracy, there is no basis for political-democratic regulation when labour is in crisis. The end of labour is the end of politics.

### **13. The casino-capitalist simulation of labour society**

The predominant social awareness deceives itself systematically about the actual state of the labour society: Collapsing regions are excommunicated ideologically, labour market statistics are distorted unscrupulously, and forms of impoverishment are simulated away by the media. Simulation is the central feature of crisis capitalism anyway. This is also true for the economy itself.

If – at least in the countries at the heart of the Western world – it seems that capital accumulation is possible without labour employed and that money as a pure form is able to guarantee the further valorisation of value out of itself, such appearance is owing to the simulation process going on at financial markets. As a mirror image of labour simulation by means of coercive measures imposed by the labour administration authorities, a simulation of capital valorisation developed from the speculative uncoupling of the credit system and equity market from the actual economy.

Present-time labour employed is replaced by the tapping of future-time labour that will never be employed in reality – capital accumulation taking place in some fictitious future II

so to speak. Monetary capital that no longer can profitably be reinvested in active assets, and is therefore unable to consume labour, has increasingly to resort to financial markets.

Even the Fordistic boom of capital valorisation in the heydays of the so-called „economic miracle“ after World War II was not entirely self-sustaining. As it was impossible to finance the basic preconditions of labour society otherwise, the state turned to deficit spending to an unprecedented extent. The credit volume raised exceeded revenue from taxation by far. This means that the state pledged its future actual revenue as a collateral security. On the one hand, this way an investment opportunity for „superfluous“ moneyed capital was created; it was lent to the state on interest. The state settled interest payment by raising fresh credit, thereby funnelling back the borrowed money into economic circulation.

On the other hand, this implies that social security expenditure and public spending on infrastructure was financed by way of credit. Hence, in terms of capitalist logic, an „artificial“ demand was created which was not covered by productive labour power expenditure. By tapping its own future, the labour society prolonged the lifetime of the Fordistic boom beyond its actual span.

This simulative element, being in operation even in times of a seemingly intact valorisation process, came up against limiting factors in line with the amount of indebtedness of the state. „Public debt crisis“ in the capitalist centres as well as in Third World countries put an end to the stimulation of economic growth by means of deficit spending and laid the foundation for the triumphant advance of neo-liberal deregulation policies. According to the liberal ideology, deregulation can only be effected in line with a sweeping reduction of the public-sector share in national product. In reality costs and expenses arising from crisis management, whether it is government spending on the repression apparatus or national expenditure for the maintenance of the simulation machinery, do compensate cost saving from deregulation and the reduction of state functions. In many states, the public-sector share even expanded as a result.

However, it was not possible to simulate the further accumulation of capital by means of deficit spending any longer. Consequently, in the eighties of last century, the additional creation of fictitious capital shifted to the equity market. No longer dividend, the share in real profit, is a matter of concern; rather it is stock price gains, the speculative increase in value of the legal title up to an astronomical magnitude, which counts. The ratio of real economy to speculative price movements turned upside down. The speculative price advance no longer anticipates real economic expansion but conversely, the bull market of fictitious net profit generation simulates a real accumulation that no longer exists.

Clinically dead, the labour idol is kept breathing artificially by means of a seemingly self-induced expansion of financial markets. Industrial corporations show profits that don't come

from operating income, i.e. the production and sale of goods – a loss-making branch of business for a long time – but from the „clever“ speculation of their financial departments in stocks and currency. The revenue items shown in the budgets of public authorities are not yielded by taxation or public borrowing, but by the keen participation of fiscal administrations in the financial gambling markets. Families and one-person households whose real income from wages or salaries is dropping dramatically, keep to their spending spree habit by using stocks and prospective price gains as a collateral for consumer credits. Once again, a new form of artificial demand is created resulting in production and revenue „built upon sandy ground“.

The speculative process is a dilatory tactic to defer the global economic crisis. As the fictitious increase in the value of legal titles is only the anticipation of future labour employed (to an astronomical magnitude) that will never be employed, the lid will be taken off the objectified swindle after a certain time of incubation. The breakdown of the „emerging markets“ in Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe was just a first foretaste. It is only a question of time until the financial markets of the capitalist centres in the US, the EU (European Union) and Japan will collapse.

These interrelations are completely distorted by the fetish-awareness of the labour society, inclusive of traditional left-wing and right-wing „critics of capitalism“. Fixated on the labour phantom, which was ennobled to be the transhistorical and positive precondition of human existence, they systematically confuse cause and effect. The speculative expansion of financial markets, which is the cause for the temporary deferment of crisis, is then just the other way around, detected to be the cause of the crisis. The „evil speculators“, they say more or less panic-stricken, will ruin the absolutely wonderful labour society by gambling away „good“ money of which they have more than enough just for kicks, instead of bravely investing it in marvellous „jobs“ so that a labour maniac humanity may enjoy „full employment“ self-indulgently.

It is beyond them that it is by no means speculation that brought investment in real economy to a standstill, but that such investment became unprofitable as a result of the 3rd industrial revolution. The speculative take off of share prices is just a symptom of the inner dynamics. Even according to capitalist logic, this money, seemingly circulating in ever-increasing loads, is not „good“ money any longer but rather „hot air“ inflating the speculative bubble. Any attempt to tap this bubble by means of whatsoever tax (Tobin-tax, etc.) to divert money flows to the ostensibly „correct“ and real social treadmills will most probably bring about the sudden burst of the bubble.

Instead of realising that we all become inexorably unprofitable and therefore the criterion of profitability itself, together with the immanent foundations of labour society, should be attacked as being obsolete, one indulges in demonising the „speculators“. Right-wing



extremists, left-wing „subversive elements“, worthy trade unionists, Keynesian nostalgics, social theologians, TV hosts, and all the other apostles of „honest“ labour unanimously cultivate such a cheap concept of an enemy. Very few of them are aware of the fact that it is only a small step from such reasoning to the re-mobilisation of the anti-Semitic paranoia. To invoke the „creative power“ of national-blooded non-monetary capital to fight the „money-amassing“ Jewish-international monetary capital threatens to be the ultimate creed of the intellectually dissolute left; as it has always been the creed of the racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-American „job-creation-scheme“ right.

*As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. [...] With that, production based on exchange value breaks down, and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis.*

Karl Marx, *Foundation of the Critique of Political Economy*,  
1857/8

## **14. Labour can not be redefined**

After centuries of domestication, the modern human being can not even imagine a life without labour. As a social imperative, labour not only dominates the sphere of the economy in the narrow sense, but also pervades social existence as a whole, creeping into everyday life and deep under the skin of everybody. „Free time“, a prison term in its literal meaning, is spent to consume commodities in order to increase (future) sales.

Beyond the internalised duty of commodity consumption as an end-in-itself and even outside offices and factories, labour casts its shadow on the modern individual. As soon as our contemporary rises from the TV chair and becomes active, every action is transformed into an act similar to labour. The joggers replace the time clock by the stopwatch, the treadmill celebrates its post-modern rebirth in chrome-plated gyms, and holidaymakers burn up the

kilometres as if they had to emulate the year's work of a long-distance lorry driver. Even sexual intercourse is orientated towards the standards of sexology and talk show boasting.

King Midas was quite aware of meeting his doom when anything he touched turned into gold; his modern fellow sufferers, however, are far beyond this stage. The demons for work (labour) even don't realise any longer that the particular sensual quality of any activity fades away and becomes insignificant when adjusted to the patterns of labour. On the contrary, our contemporaries quite generally only ascribe meaning, validity and social significance to an activity if they can square it with the indifference of the world of commodities. His labour's subjects don't know what to make of a feeling like grief; the transformation of grief into grieving-work, however, makes the emotional alien element a known quantity one is able to gossip about with people of one's own kind. This way dreaming turns into dreaming-work, to concern oneself with a beloved one turns into relationship-work, and care for children into child raising work past caring. Whenever the modern human being insists on the seriousness of his activities, he pays homage to the idol by using the word „work“ (labour).

The imperialism of labour then is reflected not only in colloquial language. We are not only accustomed to using the term „work/labour“ inflationary, but also mix up two essentially different meanings of the word. „Labour“ no longer, as it would be correct, stands for the capitalist form of activity carried out in the end-in-itself treadmills, but became a synonym for any goal-directed human effort in general, thereby covering up its historical tracks.

This lack of conceptual clarity paves the way for the widespread „common-sense“ critique of labour society, which argues just the wrong way around by affirming the imperialism of labour in a positivist way. As if labour would not control life through and through, the labour society is accused of conceptualising „labour“ too narrowly by only validating marketable gainful employment as „true“ labour in disregard of morally decent do-it-yourself work or unpaid self-help (housework, neighbourly help, etc.). An upgrading and broadening of the concept labour shall eliminate the one-sided fixation along with the hierarchy involved.

Such thinking is not at all aimed at emancipation from the prevailing compulsions, but is only semantic patchwork. The apparent crisis of the labour society shall be resolved by manipulation of social awareness in elevating services, which are extrinsic to the capitalist sphere of production and deemed to be inferior so far, to the nobility of „true“ labour. Yet the inferiority of these services is not merely the result of a certain ideological view, but inherent in the very fabric of the commodity-producing system and cannot be abolished by means of a nice moral re-definition.

What can be regarded as „real“ wealth has to be expressed in monetary form in a society ruled by commodity production as an end-in-itself. The concept of labour determined by this

structure imperialistically rubs off onto any other sphere, although only in a negative way in making clear that basically everything is subjected to its rule. So the spheres extrinsic to commodity production necessarily remain well within the shadow of the capitalist production sphere because they don't square with economic administrative time logic even if - and strictly when - their function is vital as it is the case with respect to „female labour“ in the spheres of „sweet“ home, loving care, etc.

A moralising broadening of the labour concept instead of radical criticism not only veils the social imperialism of the commodity producing economy, but fits extremely well with the authoritarian crisis management. The call for the full recognition of „housework“ and other menial services carried out in the so-called „3rd sector“, raised since the 1970s of the last century, was focused on social benefits at the beginning. The administration in crisis, however, has turned the table and mobilises the moral impetus of such a claim straight against financial hopes in making use of the infamous „subsidiarity principle“.

Singing the praise of „honorary posts“ and „honorary citizen activity“ does not mean that citizens may poke about in the nearly empty public coffers. Rather, it is meant to cover up the state's retreat from the field of social services, to conceal the forced labour schemes that are already under way, and to mask the mean attempt to shift the burden of crisis onto women. The public institutions retire from social commitment, appealing kindly and free of charge to „all of us“ from now on to take „private“ initiative in fighting one's very own or other's misery and never demand financial aid. This way the definition juggle with the still „sacred“ concept of labour, widely misunderstood as an emancipatory approach, clears the way for the abolition of wages by retention of labour on the scorched earth of the market economy. The steps taken by public institutions bear out that today social emancipation cannot be achieved by means of a re-definition of labour, but only by a conscious devaluation of the very concept.

*Along with material prosperity, ordinary person-related services would increase immaterial prosperity. The well-being of the customer will improve if the „service provider“ relieves him of cumbersome chores. At the same time the well-being of the „service-provider“ will improve because the service rendered is likely to strengthen his self-esteem. The rendering of an ordinary, person-related service is better for*

*the psyche [of the service provider] than the situation of being jobless. Report of the „Commission on future social questions of the free states of Bavaria and Saxony“, 1997*

*[...]Properly thou hast no other knowledge but what thou hast got by working: the rest is yet all a hypothesis.*

*Thomas Carlyle, Working and not Despairing, 1843*

## **15. The crisis of opposing interests**

However much the fundamental crisis of labour is repressed and made a taboo, its influence on any social conflict is undeniable. The transition from a society that was able to integrate the masses to a system of selection and apartheid though did not lead to a new round of the old class struggle between capital and labour. Rather the result was a categorical crisis of the opposing interests as inherent in the system as such. Even in the period of prosperity after World War II, the old emphasis of class struggle was on the wane. The reason for that was not that the „preordained“ revolutionary subject (i.e. the working class) had been integrated into society by means of manipulative wheelings and dealings and the bribes of a questionable prosperity. On the contrary, the emphasis faded because the logical identity of capital and labour as functional categories of a common social fetish form became evident on the stage of social development reached in the times of Fordism. The desire to sell the commodity labour power at best price, as immanent in the system, destroyed any transcendental perspective.

Up to the seventies of last century, the working class struggled for the participation of ever larger sections of the population in the venomous fruits of the labour society. Under the crisis conditions of the 3rd Industrial Revolution however, even this impetus lost momentum. Only as long as the labour society expanded, was it possible to stage the battle of opposing interests on a large scale. When the common foundation falls into ruins, it becomes more or less impossible to pursue the interests as inherent in the system by means of joint action. De-solidarity becomes a general phenomenon. Wage workers desert trade unions, senior executives desert employers' associations – everyone for himself, and the capitalist system-god against everybody. Individualisation, so often invoked, is nothing but another symptom of the crisis of labour society.

It is only on a micro-economic scale that interests may still be able to combine. Inasmuch as it became somewhat of a privilege to organise one's very own life in accordance with the

principles of business administration, which, by the way, makes a mockery of the idea of social emancipation, the representation of the interests of the commodity labour power degenerated into tough lobbyism of ever smaller sections of the society. Whoever is willing to accept the logic of labour has to accept the logic of apartheid as well. The various trade unions focus on ensuring that their ever smaller and very particular membership is able to sell its skin at the cost of the members of other unions. Workers and shop stewards no longer fight the executive management of their own company, but the wage earners of competing enterprises and industrial locations, no matter whether the rivals are based in the nearest neighbourhood or in the Far East. Should the question arise who is going to get the kick when the next internal company rationalisation becomes due, the colleagues next door turn into foes.

The uncompromising de-solidarity is not restricted to the internal conflicts in companies or the rivalry between various trade unions. As all the functional categories of the labour society in crisis fanatically insist on the logic immanent in the system, that is, that the well-being of humans has to be a mere by-product or side effect of capital valorisation, nowadays basically any conflict is governed by the „St. Florian-principle“. (German saying/prayer: „Holy St. Florian, please spare my home. Instead of that you may set on fire the homes in my neighbourhood“. St. Florian is the patron saint of fire protection.) All lobbyists know the rules and play the game. Any penny received by the clients of a competing faction is a loss. Any cut in social security payments to the detriment of others may improve one's own prospect of a further period of grace. Thus the old-age pensioner becomes the natural adversary of all social security contributors, the sick person turns into the enemy of health insurance policy holders, and the hatred of „native citizens“ is unleashed on immigrants.

This way the attempt to use opposing interests inherent in the system as a leverage for social emancipation is irreversibly exhausted. The traditional left has finally reached a dead end. A rebirth of radical critique of capitalism depends on the categorical break with labour. Only if the new aim of social emancipation is set beyond labour and its derivatives (value, commodity, money, state, law as a social form, nation, democracy, etc.), a high level of solidarity becomes possible for society as a whole. Resistance against the logic of lobbyism and individualisation then could point beyond the present social formation, but only if the prevailing categories are referred to in a non-positivist way.

Until now, the left shirks the categorical break with labour society. Systemic constraints are played down to be mere ideology, the logic of the crises is considered to be due to a political project of the „ruling class“. The categorical break is replaced by „social-democratic“ and Keynesian nostalgia. The left does not strive for a new concrete universality beyond abstract labour and money form, but frantically holds on to the old form of abstract universality which they deem to be the one and only basis for the battle of opposing interests as intrinsic to the system. However, these attempts remain abstract and cannot integrate any social

mass movement simply because the left dodges dealing with the preconditions and causes of the crisis of the labour society.

This is particularly true of the call for a guaranteed citizen's income. Instead of combining concrete social action and resistance against certain measures of the apartheid regime with a general programme against labour, this demand produces a false universality of social critique, which remains abstract, intrinsic to the system, and helpless in every respect. The motive force behind the cut-throat competition described above cannot be neutralised that way. The full swing of the global labour treadmill to the end of time is ignorantly presupposed; where should the money to finance a state-guaranteed income come from, if not from the smooth running of the valorisation machine? Whoever relies on such a „social dividend“ (even this term speaks volumes) has on the quiet to bank on a winner position of his „own“ country in the global free-market economy. Only the winner of the free-market world war may be able to afford the feeding of millions of capitalistically „superfluous“ and penniless boarders for a short period; furthermore it goes without saying that the holders of foreign passports are then „naturally“ excluded.

The do-it-yourself squad of reformism is ignorant of the capitalist constitution of the money form in every respect. In the end, as it becomes apparent that both the labour subject and the commodity-consuming subject are doomed to perish, they only want to rescue the latter one. Instead of calling into question the capitalist way of life as such, they wish that despite crisis, the world is to be buried under a vast column of fuming cars, ugly concrete piles, and trashy commodities. Their main concern is that people may still be able to enjoy the one and only miserable freedom modern humans can conceive of: the freedom of choice in front of supermarket shelves.

Yet even this sad and reduced perspective is completely illusionary. Its left-wing protagonists - and theoretical illiterates - have long forgotten that capitalist commodity consumption has never been about the satisfaction of needs, but is and has always been nothing but a function and mere by-product of the valorisation process. When labour power cannot be sold any longer, even essential needs are regarded as outrageous luxury claims, which must be lowered to a minimum. That's why, under the circumstances of crisis, a citizen's income-scheme will suggest itself as a solution. As an instrument for the reduction of government spending, it will become the cheap version of social benefits, replacing the collapsing social insurance system. It was Milton Friedman, the brain of neo-liberalism, who originally designed the concept of a citizen's income just for the reduction of public expenditure. A disarmed left now takes up this concept as if it is a lifeline. However, citizen's income will become reality only as pittance - or it will never be.

*It has appeared, that from the inevitable laws of our nature some human beings must suffer from want. These are the unhappy persons who, in the great lottery of life, have drawn a blank.*

Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 1798

## **16. The abolition of labour**

The categorical break with labour will not find any existing, objectively determinable social camp, as it was the case in respect to traditional social action as inherent in the system. It is a break with the false and misleading laws and the common-sense thinking of a „second nature“, and by no means the only repeated and quasi-automatic execution of the latter. Instead of that, the break requires a negating consciousness, refusal and rebellion without being able to rely on the backing of whatsoever „law of history“. No abstract-universal principle can provide the point of departure, but only the repulsion of one's very own existence as a subject of labour and competition and the flat refuse of a life to rule on an ever more miserable level.

For all its predominance, labour has never succeeded in completely wiping out the disgust at the constraints brought about by this form of social mediation. Apart from all the forms of regressive fundamentalism, the competition complex at the heart of social Darwinism in particular, a potential for protest and resistance does still exist. Anxiety and uneasiness is widespread, but was repressed to the socio-psychic subconscious and thereby silenced. For this reason, it is necessary to clear space for intellectual and mental freedom to enable the thinking of the unthinkable. The labour camp's world monopoly of interpretation must be contested. Theoretical reflection of labour can serve as a catalyst. It is the task of theory to fiercely attack the ban on thinking and to say loudly and clearly what nobody dares to think, but many people sense: the labour society is nearing its end. And there is definitely no reason to deplore its demise.

Only an explicitly formulated critique of labour along with a corresponding theoretical debate could bring about a new public awareness; the latter being the indispensable prerequisite for the constitution of a social movement that puts labour critique into practice.

The interior controversies of the labour camp are exhausted and become more and more absurd. That is why there is a dire need for a re-determination of social conflict lines along which a social movement against labour can form up.

It is necessary to describe in broad outline what are the possible goals for a world beyond labour. However, it is not a canon of positivist principles that feeds the programme against labour, rather it is the power of negation. In the course of the enforcement of labour, the basic means and social relations constituting life were alienated from humans. The negation of labour society is only possible if humans re-appropriate their capacity of social existence as social beings on an even higher historical level. The opponents of labour will strive for the constitution of global associations of free individuals who are ready to wrest the means of production and existence from the labour idol's hand and its idle running valorisation machine in order to take charge of social reproduction themselves. Only in struggling against the monopolisation of all social resources and potentials for material wealth withheld by the powers of alienation as objectified in market and state, can social realms of emancipation be conquered.

This implies that private property must be attacked in a different way. For the traditional left, private property was not the legal form intrinsic to the commodity producing system, but merely an ominous and subjective capitalist „control“ over resources. That gave rise to the absurd idea that private property could be overcome in terms of the categories of the system itself. State property („nationalisation“) seemed to be the counter model of private property. The state, however, is nothing but the outer cloak of forced community or, in other words, the abstract generality of the socially atomised commodity producers. Hence, state property is a form which itself is derived from private property, no matter whether garnished with the adjective „socialist“ or not.

In the crisis of labour society, both private property and state property become obsolete because any of them require a smoothly running valorisation process. That is the reason why tangible assets increasingly turn into dead assets. Industrial and legal institutions jealously guard them and put them under lock and key to make sure that the means of production decay rather than be made available for other purposes. A takeover of the means of production by associations of free individuals against the resistance of the state, its legal institutions, and the repressive constraints exerted by them, implies that these means of production will no longer be mobilised in the form of commodity production for the anonymous markets.

Commodity production then will be replaced by open debate, mutual agreement, and collective decision of all members of society on how resources can be used wisely. It will become possible to establish the institutional identity of producers and consumers, unheard-of and unthinkable under the dictate of the capitalist end-in-itself. Market and state,



institutions (once) alienated from human society, will be replaced by a graded system of councils, from town district level to the global level, where associations of free individuals will decide about the flow of resources in letting prevail sensual, social, and ecological reason.

No longer will labour and „occupation“ as an end-in-itself govern life, but the organisation of the wise use of common (species) capacities which will no longer be subjected to the control of the automatic „invisible hand“, but will be conscious social action. The material wealth produced will be appropriated according to needs and not according to „solvency“. When labour vanishes, the abstract universality of money and state will dissolve as well. A one-world society with no need for borders will take the place of the separated nations – a world where everybody can move freely and will be able to avail himself of universal hospitality.

Critique of labour does not mean to coexist peacefully with the systemic constraints and take refuge to some social niche-resort, but is in fact a declaration of war on the prevailing order. The slogans of social emancipation only can be: Let's take what we need! We no longer bow under the yoke of labour! We will no longer be down on our knees before the democratic crisis administration! The basic prerequisite is that the new forms of social organization (free associations, councils) are in control of all the material and social means of social reproduction. In that, our vision differs fundamentally from the limited goals of the narrow-minded lobbyists of an „allotment garden“ socialism.

The rule of labour brought about a split in human personality and mind. It separates the economic subject from the citizen, the workhorse from the party animal, abstract public life from abstract private life, socially constituted maleness from socially constituted femaleness, and it confronts the isolated individuals with their very own social species capacities and social commonality as an extrinsic foreign power dominating them. The opponents of labour are striving to overcome this schizophrenia by means of a concrete re-appropriation of the social context through conscious and self-reflecting human action.

*Labour, by its very nature is unfree, unhuman, unsocial activity, determined by private property and creating private property. Hence the abolition of private property will become a reality only when it is conceived as the abolition of labour.*

Karl Marx, *Draft of an Article on Friedrich List's book: Das*

## **17. A programme on the abolishment of labour directed against the enthusiasts of labour**

The opponents of labour will certainly be accused of being nothing but dreamers. History has shown that a society that is not based on the principles of labour, repression, free market competition, and egoism cannot work, they will say. Do you, apologists of the prevailing order, really want to claim that the capitalist commodity production has brought about at least a passable life for the majority of the global population? Do you call it „smooth working“ if, due to the rapid growth of the productive forces, billions of humans are ostracised and can consider themselves lucky when they can survive on waste dumps? What about those billions of other people who can only endure their harassed life under the rule of labour in isolating themselves and numbing their minds by exposing themselves to a constant stream of dreary „entertainment“ and fall mentally and physically sick in the end? What about the fact that the world is made a desert currently just to breed more money out of money? Well! That's the way your marvellous labour system „works“. To be honest with you, we really don't want to cover ourselves with the glory of such „exploits“!

Your conceit rests on your ignorance and the weakness of your memory. In justification of your present and future crimes, you rely on the disastrous state of the world as brought about by your earlier crimes. It slipped your mind – actually you suppressed all memory of it – that the state was obliged to commit mass murder to drum your false „law of nature“ into people until it became their second nature to consider it a privilege to be employed under the orders of the system idol who drains their life energy for the absurd end-in-itself.

It was necessary to eradicate all the institutions of social self-organisation and self-determination constituting the old agrarian societies before mankind was ripe to internalise the rule of labour and selfishness. Maybe you did a thorough job. We are not over-optimistic. We cannot know whether Pavlov's dogs can escape from their conditioned existence. It remains to be seen whether the decline of labour will lead to a cure of labour-mania or to the end of civilisation.

You will argue that superseding private property and abolishing the social constraint of earning money will result in inactivity and that laziness will spread. So you confess that your entire „natural“ system is based on nothing but coercive force? Is this the reason why you dread laziness as a mortal sin committed against the spirit of the labour idol? Frankly, the opponents of labour are not against laziness. We will give priority to the restoration of a culture of leisure, which was once the hallmark of any society but was exterminated to

enforce restless production divested of any sense and meaning. That's why the opponents of labour will lose no time in shutting down all those branches of production which only exist to let keep running the maniac end-in-itself machinery of the commodity producing system, regardless of the consequences.

And don't believe that we are only talking about the car industry, defence industry, and nuclear industry, that is to say, industries, which are obviously a public danger. We also think of the large number of „mental crutches“ and silly fancy-goods designed to create the illusion of a full life. Furthermore, those occupations will disappear that only came into being because the masses of products had and have to be forced through the bottleneck of money form and market relations. Or do you think we will be still in need of accountants, controllers, marketing advisers, salesmen, and advertising copywriters if things are produced according to needs and everybody can take what he or she wants? Why should there be revenue officers and police forces, welfare workers and poverty administrators when there is no private property to protect, no poverty to administer, and nobody who has to be drilled in obeying alienated systemic constraints?

We can already hear the outcry: What about all these jobs? That's right! You are welcome to figure out what part of its lifetime humanity squanders every single day in accumulating „dead labour“, in controlling people, and in greasing the systemic machinery. Entire libraries are cram-full of volumes describing the grotesque, repressive, and destructive properties of things produced by the end-in-itself social machinery. If we would only switch it off, we could bask in the sun for hours. Don't be afraid however. That does not mean that all activity will cease if the coercion exerted by labour were to disappear. It is the quality of human activity, though, that will change as soon as it is no longer subject to a sphere of abstract (Newtonian) time flow, divested of any meaning and a mere end-in-itself, but which can be carried out in accord with an individual and variable time scale fitting with one's own way of life. The same applies to large-scale production when people will be able to decide themselves how to organise the procedures and sequences of operation without being subjected to the compulsions of valorisation. Why should we allow the impertinent impositions forced upon us by means of the „law of competition“ to haunt us? It is necessary to rediscover slowness and tranquillity.

What will not vanish are housekeeping and the care for people who became „invisible“ under the conditions of the labour society, basically all those activities that were separated from „political economy“ and stamped „female“. Neither the preparation of a delicious meal, nor baby care can be automated. When along with the abolition of labour the gender segregation will dissolve, these essential activities can be brought to the light of a conscious social (re-)organisation beyond gender stereotypes. The repressive character of the „chores“ will dissolve as soon as people are no longer subsumed under what essentially constitutes their life. Men and women likewise then can do those things according to the circumstances

and the actual needs.

Our contention is not that every activity will turn into pure pleasure. Some of them will, some of them will not. It goes without saying that there will always be necessities. But who will be scared of that if it doesn't consume one's life? There will be always more that can be done of one's own accord. Being active is as much a need as leisure. Even labour was not capable of wiping out this need, but exploited it for its own ends, thereby sucking it dry like a vampire.

The opponents of labour are neither fanatics of blind activism nor do they champion passive loafing. Leisure, dealing with necessities and voluntary activities are to be balanced wisely, taking in account actual needs and the individual circumstances of life. As soon as the productive forces are freed from the capitalist constraints of labour, disposable time for the individual will increase. Why should we spend long hours in assembly shops or offices when machines of all kind can do such „work“? Why should hundreds of human bodies get into a sweat when only a few harvesters can achieve the same result? Why should we busy our intellect with dull routine when computers can easily accomplish the objects?

Only the lesser part of technology can be adopted in its capitalist form, though. The bulk of technical units will have to be reshaped because they were constructed in accordance with the narrow-minded criteria of abstract profitability. On the other hand, for the same reason, many technological conceptions were debarred from realisation. Even though solar energy can be produced „just round the corner“, labour society banks on centralised large-scale power stations at the hazard of human life. Ecologically friendly methods of cultivation are well known long since, but the abstract profit calculation pours thousands of toxic substances into the water, ruins the fertile soil, and pollutes the air. For mere „economic-administrative“ reasons, construction components and groceries are sent round the globe although most things could be produced locally and could be delivered by short-distance freight-traffic. For the most part, capitalist technology is just as absurd and superfluous as the entailed expenditure of human energy utilised in the industrial process.

We don't tell you anything new. You do know all these things very well. Nevertheless, you will never draw the logical consequences and will act accordingly. You refuse to decide consciously how to make use of the means of production, transportation, and communication wisely and which options should be discarded because they are destructive or simply unnecessary. The more hectically you reel off your mantra of „freedom and democracy“, the more grimly you refuse any social freedom of choice in respect of even essential matters because of your desire to keep on obeying the ruling corpse of labour and its pseudo „laws of nature“.

*But that labour itself, not merely in present conditions but insofar as its purpose in general is the mere increase of wealth – that labour itself, I say, is harmful and pernicious – follows from the political economist's line of argument, without his being aware of it.*

Karl Marx, *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1844

## **18. The struggle against labour is anti-politics**

The abolition of labour is anything else but obscure utopia. In its present form, global society can not survive for more than 50 or 100 years. The fact that the opponents of labour have to deal with the clinically dead labour idol does not necessarily make their task any easier. The more the crisis of labour society is worsening and reformist attempts of „repair work“ fail, the more the gap is widening between the isolated and helpless monads as constituted by (capitalist) society and the potential formation of a movement that is ready to re-appropriate the socially constituted species capacities. The rapid degeneration of social relations all over the world proves that the old ideas and sentiments on labour and competition are unshaken, but are readjusted to ever-lower standards. Step-by-step de-civilisation seems to be the „natural“ course of the crisis despite widespread discontent and unease.

Especially because of these bleak prospects, it would be fatal to refrain from criticising labour practically by means of a comprehensive socially all-embracing programme and to confine oneself to the scraping of a bare living in the ruins of labour society. Criticism of labour will only stand a chance if it swims against the tide of de-socialisation instead of being carried away by it. The standards of civilisation, however, cannot be defended by means of democratic politics, but only by fighting against it.

Those who aim at the emancipatory re-appropriation and transformation of the entire social fabric can hardly ignore the authority that has so far organised the general conditions. It is impossible to rebel against the expropriation of the social general capacities without heading for confrontation with the state. The state is not only the custodian of about 50 percent of the national social wealth, but also guarantees that all social capacities are compulsorily subject to the dictates of valorisation. It is a truism that the opponents of

labour cannot ignore state and politics. Yet it is also true that the opponents of labour can not succeed in being supportive of the state.

If the end of labour implies the end of politics, a political movement for the abolition of labour is a contradiction in terms. The opponents of labour make demands on the state, but they do not form a political party and will never do so. The whole point of politics is to seize power (i.e. to become „the administration“) and to carry on with labour society. That's why the opponents of labour don't want to take the control centres of power, but want to switch them off. Our policy is „anti-politics“.

State and politics of the modern age and the coercive system of labour are inseparably intertwined and have to disappear side by side. The twaddle about a renaissance of politics is just an attempt to haul back the critique of economic terror to the right road of positivist civil action. Self-organisation and self-determination, however, is the exact opposite of state and politics. Winning socio-economic and cultural freedom is not feasible in a political roundabout way, through official channels, or other wrong tracks of this sort, but in constituting a countersociety. Freedom neither means to be the human raw material of the markets, nor does it mean to be the dressage horse of state administration. Freedom means that human beings organise their social relations on their own without the intervention and mediation of an alienated apparatus.

According to this spirit, the opponents of labour want to create new forms of social movement and want to occupy bridgeheads for a reproduction of life beyond labour. It is now a question of combining a counter-social practice with the offensive refusal of labour.

May the ruling powers call us fools because we risk the break with their irrational compulsory system! We have nothing to lose but the prospect of a catastrophe that humanity is currently heading for with the executives of the prevailing order at the helm. We can win a world beyond labour.

Workers of all countries, call it a day!

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## **EZLN: Get Organized (On the**

# Elections)

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April-May 2015

To the *compas* of the Sixth:

To those who are reading because this interests them, even if they're not part of the Sixth:

These days, just as every time this thing they call the “electoral process” rolls around, we hear and see all that stuff that comes out saying that the EZLN calls for abstention, that the EZLN says that people shouldn't vote. They say this and other idiocies, these dunces who don't study history or even care to find the truth. They even put these absurdities into history books and biographies and then charge for them. That is, they charge for these lies, like politicians. Of course, you know that we're not interested in the things that those above do in order to try to convince those below that they're concerned about them. As Zapatistas, we don't call for people not to vote nor do we call them to vote. As Zapatistas, every time we get the chance, we tell people that they should organize to resist and to struggle for what they need. We as Zapatistas, like many other originary peoples of these lands, already know how the political parties operate, and it's a bad history of bad people. And for us Zapatistas, it's a history that we've left behind.

I think it was the late *Tata*<sup>[1]</sup> Juan Chavez Alonso who said that political parties separate and divide people, creating confrontation and conflicts between them, even among members of the same family. Here we see this happen again and again. You all know that in many of the communities where we live, there are people who aren't Zapatistas and who aren't organized and who are scraping by hoping that the bad government will give them a few handouts in exchange for letting them snap a photo that will make the government look

good.

We see that every time there are elections, some people dress up in red, others in blue, others in green, others in yellow, and others in faded colors and so on. They fight amongst themselves and sometimes they even fight amongst family members. Why do they fight? Well, they fight over who is going to be in charge of them, who they are going to obey, who is going to give them orders. They think that whatever particular color wins, the people who supported that color will receive more handouts. They claim that they are very aware and yet very determined to be party members, and sometimes they even kill each other over a fucking [political party's] color. It's the same thing among all those who want a political position, regardless of whether they dress up in red, in blue, in green or yellow, or even in some new color. They say they are of the people and that therefore the people have to support them. But they aren't of the people, they're the same bad governments who one day are local representatives, the next day are union leaders, then they are party functionaries, and then municipal presidents. That is how they work, bouncing from one position to another and from one color to another. They are the same people as always, they have same last names, from the same families as always, the sons, grandchildren, uncles, nephews, relatives, brothers in-law, boyfriends, lovers, and friends of the same assholes[2] as always. They always say the same thing: that they are going to save the people; that this time they are going to behave themselves; that now they won't steal so much; that they are going to help those who have nothing; and that they're going to pull them out of poverty.

Well, then they spend their little money, which by the way is not theirs but rather what they take from tax revenue. But those assholes don't spend that money to help those who are down-and-out. No, they spend it on their political propaganda, putting up posters and photos, buying radio advertisements and TV spots, placing ads in newspapers and magazines, and even buying time at the movies.

As soon as it's clear who won, those people in the communities who are such loyal *partidistas* during the election and so determined about which color they're supporting, all switch to the victorious color because they think that way they're going to get their little handout. For example, supposedly now they're going to give out televisions. Well, as Zapatistas, we say that what the people are being given is a garbage can because through this television what they are getting is a mountain of garbage. Regardless of whether the parties give out what was promised, at this point they can't and won't give them anything at all.

If the parties gave them anything, well, it was in order to make them lazy. The people even forgot how to work the land. They're just there, waiting for the next government handout to arrive so they can waste it on booze. And there they are in their houses, making fun of *us* because we are *working* the land, while they just sit there waiting for their wife or daughter



to return from collecting the government's handout that they sent her to go pick up.

It goes on like this until the day comes that the handout doesn't arrive. There is no notice that the handouts will stop; it isn't announced in the paid press and no one comes any longer to tell them that they are their saviors. The handouts dry up. At that point, these brothers and sisters realize that they have nothing; that there is no money for booze, but there's also no money for corn, beans, soap, or underwear. So they have to return to the land that they had abandoned, now so overgrown that they can't even walk through it. Since they have forgotten how to work, soon their hands are covered in blisters and they can't even hold a machete. That's how useless they have become living off of handouts from the government instead of working.

This is already happening. They don't talk about it in the news that's controlled by the bad government. Quite the contrary, the news says that there is a ton of government programs. But none of this is getting to the people. Where does the money go that the government says it's spending on handouts in the campaign against poverty? Well, we know that those above have already told these brothers and sisters that there is going to be less money or that there isn't going to be any money at all. Do you really think that if the *campesinos* who were getting hand-outs stopped working, that those above distributing the handouts still work? Of course not. That guy above is also accustomed to getting something for nothing. He doesn't know how to live honorably from his own work; he only knows how to live off his government position.

Well, now that there is less money, there are no handouts. All of the money remains up above. The governor takes a chunk; the judge takes some, so do the police, a bit goes to the local representative, some to the municipal president, some to the administrator, some to the *campesino* leader and well, there's nothing left for the *partidista* families. Before there was a little something, but now there's nothing. "What's happening?" ask the *partidistas*. They think that this is happening because their chosen [political party] color is failing and so they try another color. But the result is the same. In their assemblies, the *partidistas* get angry. They shout and accuse each other of things, they call each other corrupt, traitors, and sell-outs. Ultimately, it's *both* the ones who are shouting and being shouted at who are corrupt, traitors, and sell-outs.

So the ones that they call the base of the party lose hope, they start to worry and to feel bad. They stop joking because they realize that in the Zapatista homes there is corn, beans, vegetables, and a little bit of money for medicine and clothes. Our collective labor helps us support one another when there is a necessity. And for us, there is a clinic and there is a school. None of this is because the government has come to help us. We ourselves have helped one another as Zapatista *compañeros* and *compañeroas* of the Sixth.

So the *partidista* brother comes to us all sad and asks us what to do, saying that he is screwed. Well, you know what we say to him:

We don't tell him that he should change to another party—the one that is now the least bad option. We don't tell him to vote. Nor do we tell him not to vote. We don't tell him that he should become a Zapatista because we already know, from our history, that not everyone has the strength or heart to be a Zapatista. We don't make fun of him. We tell him that he should organize, plain and simple.

"And then what do I do?" he asks.

We say to him:

"Then you will see for yourself what to do, what emerges in your heart and your head. No one else is going to tell you what to do."

And he says,

"The situation is really bad."

We don't lie to him, grandstand, or make speeches. We tell him the truth:

"It's going to get worse."

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Well, we know that that's how things are.

But as Zapatistas, we are clear that there are still people, in other parts of the city and countryside, who fall into the same trap as the *partidistas*. Being involved with the party seems very attractive, because you can get money without doing any work, without toiling away to make a few cents and have something dignified to eat, to clothe yourself and be able to take care of your health.

But what those above do is deceive people. That is their job and that is how they survive. And we see that there are still people who believe them, who still think that yes, the situation is going to get better, and that this leader is going to fix their problems. They still believe that this one is going to behave himself and not steal so much, and that he'll only be involved in a couple of dodgy dealings. So they give him a chance.

We say that these are pieces of little histories that have to play themselves out, that people

have to learn for themselves that no one will solve their problems for them. We say that instead we will have to solve these problems ourselves, as organized collectives. It is the people who create solutions, not leaders or parties, and we're not saying this because it sounds nice, but because we see it in reality, because we are already living it.

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It could be said that a long time ago, before they became part of the institutional apparatus, some of the *partidistas* on the left sought to build awareness among the people. They weren't seeking power through elections, but rather to move people to organize themselves, struggle, and change the system—not just the government, the whole system.

Why do I say before they became *partidistas* of the institutional left? Well, because we know that there have been parties on the left that aren't involved in the dealings of the world above. They have the same form as the political parties, but they don't sell out, or give up, or change their belief that we must end the capitalist system. We as Zapatista know—and we don't forget—that the history of struggle from below has also been written with their blood. But money is money, and above is above, and the *partidistas* of the institutional left have changed their thinking, and now they seek paid positions. It's that simple, money—in other words, they're looking to get paid.

Do you really think that it's possible to create political consciousness by disdaining, humiliating, and scolding those below? Do you think it's possible to do this by telling those below that they're a bunch of freeloaders<sup>[3]</sup> who don't think? By telling them that they are ignorant? Do you think that you create political consciousness by asking people to vote for you while simultaneously telling them that they're fools who would sell out for a television? When someone says to you, "hey you, *partidista* of the left, this asshole who says that he's the hope for the future actually used to work for the other colors [parties] and he's still a rat," do you think that you create consciousness by responding that whoever says this has sold out to Peña Nieto? Do you think that you create political consciousness by lying to people and telling them that we Zapatistas tell people not to vote, when actually you're just reacting to the fact that you don't have enough people on your voter rolls [to be recognized as an official party], that is, enough people to guarantee that you'll receive [government] money and so you're simply looking for someone to blame? Do you think that you create consciousness by having the same people work in your party who just recently used to be yellow, or red, or green or blue? Do you think that you create consciousness by saying that people who have no formal education shouldn't vote and that they are poor because they are ignorant fools who only vote for the PRI?

If in Chiapas, Velasco literally slaps people,<sup>[4]</sup> those *partidistas* slap people around with their poorly-hidden racism. It is clear that the only thing about which those *partidistas* are

creating consciousness is that in addition to being arrogant, they're also idiots. What do these *partidistas* think? That after being insulted, lied to, and scolded, the people from below are going to get down on their knees in front of their color, vote for them, and beg to be saved?

We Zapatistas say that here is the proof that in order to be a party politician above, one has to be shameless, a fool, a criminal—or all three.

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We say that we shouldn't be afraid of having the people rule. It is the healthiest and most just way. It is the people themselves who are going to make the changes that are truly necessary. It is the only way that a new system of government is going to exist. It's not that we don't understand what choosing a candidate or participating in an election means. It's just that we Zapatistas have a different calendar and geography for how to have elections in rebel territory, in resistance. We have our own ways in which the people truly choose, and not through spending millions, much less producing tons of plastic rubbish and posters with photos of rats and criminals.

It is true that it's been barely 20 years now that we've been choosing our autonomous authorities through real democracy. But this is how we have been able to move forward, with the freedom that we have achieved for ourselves and with an 'other' justice, that of an organized people. Here thousands of women and men are involved in the process of electing our authorities and everyone comes to agreement and organizes to ensure compliance with the mandate of the people. It is a system where the people organize to determine the work that will be undertaken by those authorities. In other words, the people command their government.

The people organize in assemblies where they begin to express their opinions, and from there, proposals emerge, and these proposals are studied for their advantages and disadvantages to decide which one is best. Before making a decision, the proposals are taken back to the people and the assembly for approval. In this way, a decision can be made in accordance with the majority of the communities.

This is Zapatista life in the communities. It has become our culture. Does this all seem very slow to you? That is why we say we do things according to our calendar. Do you think we can only do this because we are indigenous peoples? That is why we say that it is according to our geography. It is true that we have made many mistakes and have had many failures. It is also true that we will have more. But they are our failures. We make them and we pay for them.

This is different than in the political parties where the leaders make mistakes, where they even get paid for them, and then those below pay the price. That is why the elections coming in the month of June mean nothing to us either way. We don't call for people to vote, nor do we call for them not to vote. It just doesn't interest us. What's more, it doesn't worry us. What interests us as Zapatistas is knowing how to resist and confront the many heads of the capitalist system that exploits us, represses us, disappears us, and steals from us.

It is not just in one place or in one way that capitalism oppresses you. It oppresses you if you're a woman. It oppresses you if you're a white-collar worker. It oppresses you if you're a blue-collar worker. It oppresses you if you're a *campesino*. It oppresses you if you're a young person. It oppresses you if you are a child. It oppresses you if you're a teacher. It oppresses you if you're a student. It oppresses you if you're an artist. It oppresses you if you think. It oppresses you if you are human or plant or water or earth or air or animal. It doesn't matter how many times they wash or perfume it, the capitalist system is still "dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt" (it's on you to figure out who wrote this and where).<sup>[5]</sup>

So our idea isn't to promote voting. It's also not to promote abstention or nullifying your vote. It's not to provide recipes for how to confront capitalism. Nor is it to impose our thinking on others.

The idea of this seminar is to look at the different heads of the capitalist system to try to understand whether it has new ways of attacking us or whether they are the same ones as before. If we are interested in other ways of thinking, it is in order to see if we are right about what we think is coming—that there will be a tremendous economic crisis that will be added to existing evils and do tremendous damage to everyone everywhere, all over the world. So if it's true that this is coming, or that it's already happening, we need to think about whether it will work to keep doing the same things that have been done before.

We think that each of us has an obligation to think, to analyze, to reflect, to critique, to find our own pace, our own way, in our own places and times. Now, I ask those of you who are reading this, whether you vote or don't vote: will it do you any harm to think about what is going on in this world that we live in, to analyze it, to understand it? Does thinking critically impede voting or abstaining from voting? Will it help us to organize or won't it?

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Finishing up on elections: Just so that it's very clear and you aren't misled about what we say and don't say. We understand that there are those who think that it is possible to change the system by voting in elections. We say that's a difficult position because it is the boss himself who organizes the elections, who decides who the candidates are, who says

how, when, and where to vote, who announces who wins, and who says whether the election was legal or not. Well, there are people who think that this can work. That's fine, we don't say it can't, but we also don't say it can.

So, whether you vote for a color, for one of the washed-out colors, or you don't vote: what we say is that we have to organize ourselves and take into our own hands the decision of who governs and find a way to make them obey the people. If you already decided that you won't go vote, we don't say that's good, nor do we say that it's bad. We only say that we think that it's not enough, that besides all that, you have to organize yourselves. Of course, you also have to prepare yourself because they will blame you for the poor showing of the institutional parties of the left.

If you have already decided that you are going to vote and you already know who you will vote for, well same thing, our opinion isn't that that's good or bad. What we do say is that you should prepare yourself because you're going to be enraged by the cheating and fraud that will occur. Those in Power are experts in cheating; what's going to happen has already been decided by those above.

We also know that there are leaders who deceive the people. They say that there are only two paths to change the system: the electoral struggle or the armed struggle. They say this because they're ignorant or shameless, or both. First of all, they aren't fighting to change the system, or to take power, but to be government. That's not the same thing. They say that once they are in government, they will do good things, but they are careful to make it clear that they're not going to change the system; they're only going to get rid of the worst aspects of the system.

Perhaps they should study a little and learn that to be in government isn't to have Power. You can see that they don't realize that if they get rid of the bad parts of capitalism [as they say they want to do], then it won't be capitalism anymore. I'm going to tell you why: because capitalism is the exploitation of man by man, of the many by the few. Even if the system includes women, it's the same. Even if it begins to include *otroas*, it's the same. It's still the system where *unoas* enrich themselves with the work of *otroas*. The *otroas* above are few, and the *otroas* below are many. If those *partidistas* say that this is fine and they just have to be careful that they don't push it too far, that's fine, let them say it.

But there are more than the two ways that they describe to get into government (the armed path and the electoral path). They forget that the government can also be bought (or have they already forgotten how Peña Nieto got there?) Not only that, but perhaps they've also forgotten that it's possible to rule without being in government. If these people say that it's only possible to get into government through weapons or elections, the only thing they are actually saying is that they don't know their own history, that they haven't studied it, that

they have no imagination, and that they have no shame. It would be healthy for them to see just a little of what happens below. But they can't; their necks have cramped because they've been so set on looking above.

That is why we Zapatistas don't get tired of saying organize yourselves. Let's organize ourselves. Each person where they are must struggle to organize themselves. Let's work to organize ourselves. Let's begin by thinking how to start organizing and let's gather together in order to unite our organizations for a world where the people rule and the government obeys. In sum, as we said before, and as we say now: whether you vote or not, get organized.

And well, we Zapatistas think that we have to have good ideas in order to organize ourselves, which is to say, we need theory; we need critical thought. With critical thought we can analyze the ways of the enemy, of the one who oppresses us, exploits us, represses us, devalues us, and steals from us. But with critical thought we can also examine our own path, our own steps.

For this reason, we are calling on all of the Sixth to have meetings of thought, analysis, theory; about how you see the world, your struggle, and your history.

We call on all of you to have your own seminars and share with us the ideas that you cultivate there.

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As Zapatistas, we are going to continue governing ourselves as we already do: here the people rule and the government obeys.

As our Zapatista *compañeros* say: *Hay lum tujbil vitil ayotik*. Which means: how good it is, the way that we are now.

Another: *Nunca ya kikitaybajtic bitilon zapatista*. Which means: we will never stop being Zapatistas.

One more: *Jatoj kalal yax chamon te yax voon sok viil zapatista*. Which means: even after I'm dead, I'll still be a Zapatista.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.

In the name of the EZLN, the men, women, children and elders of the Zapatista Army for National Liberation.

Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés

Mexico, April-May of 2015.

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## NOTES

[1] Father, or elder. A term of respect.

[2] The text uses “*cabrón*,” like bully or asshole, and “*cabra*,” (literally “goat”), playing with the feminine form of gendered nouns in Spanish.

[3] In the original text this is “*come-tortas*,” or “sandwich-gobblers,” a reference to those who accept gifts or handouts—often a sandwich at a rally—from the political parties in return for support.

[4] A reference to Chiapas governor Manuel Velasco slapping an assistant at a public event on December 9, 2014, which was caught on camera.

[5] From Karl Marx’ *Capital Volume 1*, Chapter 31.

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# James Boggs: Community Building: An Idea Whose Time Has Come

*“Community Building: An Idea Whose Time Has Come” is a speech delivered on April 5, 1987, in Detroit to an African American Leadership Conference titled “Return to the Source II,” a follow-up to a conference two years prior during which he gave a “State of the Nation Address.”*





GRACE LEE BOGGS AND JAMES BOGGS, IN AN UNDATED PHOTO. LEELEE FILMS.

“That is why the main question before us is “How can we become new men and new women?” willing to accept the challenge to live by the vision of another culture, a new culture we still have to create, a culture based on social responsibility and respect for one another instead of individualism and materialism and on a love for and kinship with the land and with Nature, instead of viewing Nature as something to be conquered and land as a commodity to be owned? How do we create a culture that is life affirming rather than life destroying, which is based on caring and compassion rather than on the philosophy of the “survival of the fittest” ?

In order to create this new life affirming culture, our first priority must be the rebuilding or the regeneration of our communities because it is in community that human beings have always found their personhood or their human identity as persons. You can’t find your human identity out there by yourself. It is in the community that our human identity is created because it is in the community that love, respect, and responsibility for one another are nurtured. At the present time our human identities are being destroyed mainly because our communities are destroyed by the relentless economic development of capitalist culture. Up to now we have depended upon the corporations to create communities for us — in the sense that we came to wherever the corporations had built their factories or their mines and raised our families to meet the needs of the company. Up to now we have not depended upon ourselves to build community. But now that the corporations are abandoning and destroying our communities, it is up to us to build the community. That means we need a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, we must resist the efforts of the corporations to

destroy our communities by closing down our places of work and of the urban planners who are working for the mayor to turn Detroit into a tourist center and develop the river front to lure back those folks who have abandoned the city. (One day we will have to deal with Coleman Young. Don't be fooled by the black face because race isn't good enough. You need something else besides skin color.) But at the same time we must be building the communities necessary for the human identity of ourselves and our children.

What I am talking about is what the Chinese call "walking on two legs" and Cabral called "building as we fight." This is very difficult to do. It is much easier to focus your energy on the external enemy — even though meanwhile we are losing something inside. It is especially difficult now because we are so fragmented."

Find the full piece by James Boggs [here](#).