

# Dilar Dirik: Building Democracy without the State

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“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.

*Bijê 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

Afrikan, 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 réditos 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.

Piensen 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 lo 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.

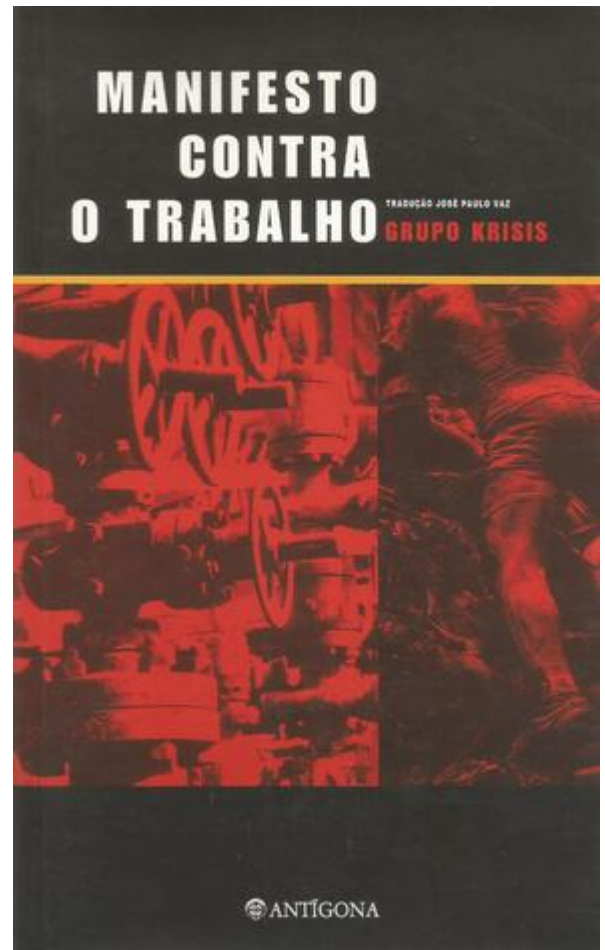
Al conflicto magisterial que la llamada reforma educativa alentó se añaden crecientes daños y amenazas a las escuelas y universidades públicas. En ambos niveles, niñez y juventud viven problemas que parecen identificarse con una política expresa -y no sólo indirecta- de desarrollo del subdesarrollo. 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 profesionalista 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: Manifiesto Against Labour**

This article was originally published Dec 31, 1999 by the [Krisis Group](#).



## 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 criterions 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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## Saskia Sassen: Who owns our

# cities - and why this urban takeover should concern us all

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BROOKLYN BRIDGE. BY DR.G.SCHMITZ (OWN WORK) [CC BY-SA 3.0  
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Does the massive foreign and national corporate buying of urban buildings and land that took off after the 2008 crisis signal an emergent new phase in major cities? From mid-2013 to mid-2014, corporate buying of existing properties exceeded \$600bn (£395bn) in the top 100 recipient cities, and **\$1trillion a year later** - and this figure includes only major acquisitions (eg. a minimum of \$5m in the case of New York City).

I want to examine the details of this large corporate investment surge, and why it matters. Cities are the spaces where those without power get to make a history and a culture, thereby making their powerlessness complex. If the current large-scale buying continues, we will lose this type of making that has given our cities their cosmopolitanism.

Indeed, at the current scale of acquisitions, we are seeing a systemic transformation in the pattern of land ownership in cities: one that alters the historic meaning of the city. Such a transformation has deep and significant implications for equity, democracy and rights.

A city is a complex but incomplete system: in this mix lies the capacity of cities across histories and geographies to outlive far more powerful, but fully formalised, systems - from large corporations to national governments. London, Beijing, Cairo, New York, Johannesburg and Bangkok - to name but a few - have all outlived multiple types of rulers and of businesses.

In this mix of complexity and incompleteness lies the possibility for those without power to assert “we are here” and “this is also our city”. Or, as the legendary statement by the fighting poor in Latin American cities puts it, “*Estamos presentes*”: we are present, we are not asking for money, we are just letting you know that this is also our city.

It is in cities to a large extent where the powerless have left their imprint - cultural, economic, social: mostly in their own neighbourhoods, but eventually these can spread to a vaster urban zone as “ethnic” food, music, therapies and more.

All of this cannot happen in a business park, regardless of its density - they are privately controlled spaces where low-wage workers can work, but not “make”. Nor can this happen in the world’s increasingly militarised plantations and mines. It is only in cities where that possibility of gaining complexity in one’s powerlessness can happen - because nothing can fully control such a diversity of people and engagements.

Those with power to some extent do not want to be bothered by the poor, so the model is often to abandon them to their own devices. In some cities (for example, in the US and Brazil) there is extreme violence by police. Yet this can often become a public issue, which is perhaps a first step in the longer trajectories of gaining at least some rights. It is in cities where so many of the struggles for vindications have taken place, and have, in the long run, partly succeeded.

But it is this possibility - the capacity to make a history, a culture and so much more - that is today threatened by the surge in large-scale corporate re-development of cities.

## **A new phase**

It is easy to explain the post-2008 urban investment surge as “more of the same”. After all, the late 1980s also saw rapid growth of national and foreign buying of office buildings and hotels, especially in New York and London. In [The Global City](#), I wrote about the large share of buildings in the City of London that were foreign-owned at the height of that phase. Financial firms from countries as diverse as Japan and the Netherlands found they needed a strong foothold in London’s City to access continental European capital and markets.

But an examination of the current trends shows some significant differences and points to a whole new phase in the character and logics of foreign and national corporate acquisitions. (I do not see much of a difference in terms of the urban impact between national and foreign investment. The key fact here is that both are corporate and large scale.) Four features stand out:

- The sharp scale-up in the buying of buildings, even in cities that have long been the object of such investments, notably NY and London. For instance, the Chinese have most recently emerged as major buyers in cities such as London and New York. Today there are about 100 cities worldwide that have become significant destinations for such acquisitions - foreign corporate buying of properties from 2013 to 2014 grew by 248% in Amsterdam/Randstadt, 180% in Madrid and 475% in Nanjing. In contrast, the growth rate was relatively lower for the major cities in each region: 68.5% for New York, 37.6% for London, and 160.8% for Beijing.
- The extent of new construction. The rapid-growth period of the 1980s and 90s was often about acquiring buildings - notably high-end Harrods in London, and Sachs Fifth Avenue and the Rockefeller Center in New York. In the post-2008 period, much buying of buildings is to destroy them and replace them with far taller, far more corporate and luxurious types of buildings - basically, luxury offices and luxury apartments.
- The spread of mega-projects with vast footprints that inevitably kill much urban tissue: little streets and squares, density of street-level shops and modest offices, and so on. These megaprojects raise the density of the city, but they actually de-urbanise it - and thereby bring to the fore the fact, easily overlooked in much commentary about cities, that density is not enough to have a city.
- The foreclosing on modest properties owned by modest-income households. This has reached catastrophic levels in the US, with Federal Reserve data showing that more than 14 million households have lost their homes from 2006 to 2014. One outcome is a significant amount of empty or under-occupied urban land, at least some of which is likely to be "re-developed".

A further striking feature of this period is the acquisition of whole blocks of underutilised or dead industrial land for site development. Here, the prices paid by buyers can get very high. One example is the acquisition of Atlantic Yards, a vast stretch of land in New York City by one of the largest Chinese building companies for \$5bn. Currently, this land is occupied by a mixture of modest factories and industrial services, modest neighbourhoods, and artists' studios and venues that have been pushed out of lower Manhattan by large-scale developments of high-rise apartment buildings.



This very urban mix of occupants will be thrown out and replaced by 14 formidable luxury residential towers - a sharp growth of density that actually has the effect of de-urbanising that space. It will be a sort of *de facto* "gated" space with lots of people; not the dense mix of uses and types of people we think of as "urban". This type of development is taking off in many cities - mostly with virtual walls, but sometimes also with real ones. I would argue that with this type of development, the virtual and the actual walls have similar impacts on de-urbanising pieces of a city.

The scale and the character of these investments are captured in the vast amounts spent on buying urban properties and land. Those global, corporate investments of \$600bn from mid-2013 to mid-2014, and over 1tn from mid-2014 to mid 2015, were just to acquire existing buildings. The figure excludes site development, another major trend.

This proliferating urban gigantism has been strengthened and enabled by the privatisations and deregulations that took off in the 1990s across much of the world, and have continued since then with only a few interruptions. The overall effect has been a reduction in public buildings, and an escalation in large, corporate private ownership.

The result is a thinning in the texture and scale of spaces previously accessible to the public. Where before there was a government office building handling the regulations and oversight of this or that public economic sector, or addressing the complaints from the local neighbourhood, now there might be a corporate headquarters, a luxury apartment building or a guarded mall.

## De-urbanisation

Global geographies of extraction have long been key to the western world's economic development. And now these have moved on to urban land, going well beyond the traditional association with plantations and mines, even as these have been extended and made more brutally efficient.

The corporatising of access and control over urban land has extended not only to high-end urban sites, but also to the land beneath the homes of modest households and government offices. We are witnessing an unusually large scale of corporate buying of whole pieces of cities in the last few years. The mechanisms for these extractions are often far more complex than the outcomes, which can be quite elementary in their brutality.

One key transformation is a shift from mostly small private to large corporate modes of ownership, and from public to private. This is a process that takes place in bits and pieces, some big and some small, and to some extent these practices have long been part of the

urban land market and urban development. But today's scale-up takes it all to a whole new dimension, one that alters the historic meaning of the city.

This is particularly so because what was small and/or public is becoming large and private. The trend is to move from small properties embedded in city areas that are crisscrossed by streets and small public squares, to projects that erase much of this public tissue of streets and squares via mega-projects with large, sometimes huge, footprints. This privatises and de-urbanises city space no matter the added density.

Large cities have long been complex and incomplete. This has enabled the incorporation of diverse people, logics, politics. A large, mixed city is a frontier zone where actors from different worlds can have an encounter for which there are no established rules of engagement, and where the powerless and the powerful can actually meet.

This also makes cities spaces of innovations, small and large. And this includes innovations by those without power: even if they do not necessarily become powerful in the process, they produce components of a city, thus leaving a legacy that adds to its cosmopolitanism - something that few other places enable.

Such a mix of complexity and incompleteness ensures a capacity to shape an urban subject and an urban subjectivity. It can partly override the religious subject, the ethnic subject, the racialised subject and, in certain settings, also the differences of class. There are moments in the routines of a city when we *all* become urban subjects - rush hour is one such mix of time and space.

But today, rather than a space for including people from many diverse backgrounds and cultures, our global cities are expelling people and diversity. Their new owners, often part-time inhabitants, are very international - but that does not mean they represent many diverse cultures and traditions. Instead, they represent the new global culture of the successful - and they are astoundingly homogeneous, no matter how diverse their countries of birth and languages. This is not the urban subject that our large, mixed cities have historically produced. This is, above all, a global "corporate" subject.

Much of urban change is inevitably predicated on expelling what used to be. Since their beginnings, whether 3,000 years old or 100, cities have kept reinventing themselves, which means there are always winners and losers. Urban histories are replete with accounts of those who were once poor and quasi-outsiders, or modest middle classes, that gained ground - because cities have long accommodated extraordinary variety.

But today's large-scale corporate buying of urban space in its diverse instantiations introduces a de-urbanising dynamic. It is not adding to mixity and diversity. Instead it

implants a whole new formation in our cities - in the shape of a tedious multiplication of high-rise luxury buildings.

One way of putting it is that this new set of implants contains within it a logic all of its own - one which cannot be tamed into becoming part of the logics of the traditional city. It keeps its full autonomy and, one might say, gives us all its back. And that does not look pretty.

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## Immanuel Wallerstein: Secular Stagnation, or is it worse?

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The world's economists have been wrestling with something they have found difficult to explain. Why is it that stock market prices have continued to go up despite the fact that something called growth seems to be stagnant? In mainstream economic theory, it's not supposed to work that way. If there's no growth, market prices should decline, thereby

stimulating growth. And when growth recovers, then market prices go up again.

Those who are faithful to this theorizing say that the anomaly is a momentary aberration. Some even deny it is true. But there are others who consider the anomaly to be an important challenge to the mainstream theorizing. They seek to revise the theorizing to take into account what many are now calling "secular stagnation." The critics include various prominent persons, some of them Nobel Prize laureates. They include such different thinkers as Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz, Paul Krugman, and Stephen Roach.

While each of these persons has a different line of argument, they share some beliefs. They all believe that what the states do has a large impact on what happens. They all believe that the present situation is unhealthy for the economy as a whole and has contributed to a significant increase in the polarization of real income. They all believe that they should try to mobilize public opinion to put pressure on governmental authorities to act in specific ways. And they all believe that, even if the present unhealthy and anomalous situation may last for some time yet, there do exist appropriate state policies that will make possible a less polarized and unhealthy economy.

In short, and this is my main point here, none of the critics are ready to go further and accept the argument that the capitalist system as such has entered a phase of inevitable decline. This means that there does not exist any governmental policy that will restore capitalism's functioning as a viable system.

Not so long ago, secular stagnation was a term used by many analysts primarily to describe the state of the Japanese economy beginning in the 1990s. But since 2008 the use of the concept has been applied to diverse areas - Eurozone members as Greece, Italy, and Ireland; oil-rich states as Russia, Venezuela, and Brazil; recently the United States as well; and potentially such previously strong economic actors as China and Germany.

One of the problems for those who seek to understand what has been happening is that different analysts use different geographies and different calendars. Some are talking of the situation state by state and some are trying to assess the situation in the world-economy as whole. Some see secular stagnation starting in 2008, others in the 1990s, still others as of the late 1960s, and a few as of even earlier.

Let me propose once again another way of viewing secular stagnation. The capitalist world-economy has existed in parts of the globe since the sixteenth century. I call this the modern world-system. It has steadily expanded geographically, finally encompassing the entire globe since the mid-nineteenth century. It has been a very successful system in terms of its guiding principle, the endless accumulation of capital. That is, seeking to accumulate capital in order to accumulate still more capital.

The modern world-system, like all systems, fluctuates. It also has mechanisms that limit the fluctuations and push the system back to equilibrium. This looks like a cycle of ups and downs. The only problem is that the downs never return to the previous low point, but rather to one somewhat higher. This is because, in the complex institutional pattern, there is resistance to going all the way down. The real shape of the cyclical rhythms is two steps up and one step down. The point of equilibrium is therefore moving. In addition to the cyclical rhythms, there are secular trends.

If one measures the abscissa of the trends, they move toward an asymptote of 100%, which of course they cannot cross. Somewhat before that point (say, about 80%), the curves begin to fluctuate wildly. This is the sign that we have moved into the structural crisis of the system. It bifurcates, meaning that there are two different, almost opposite, ways to choose the successor system(s). The only thing that is not possible is to make the present system operate in its previously normal fashion.

Whereas before that point, great efforts to transform the system resulted in little change, now the opposite is true. Every small effort to change the system has great impact. It is my argument that the modern world-system entered into this structural crisis circa 1970 and will remain in it for another 20-40 years. If we wish to assess useful action, we need to bear in mind two different temporalities, the short term (at most three years) and the middle term.

In the short term, what we can do is minimize the pain of those most negatively affected by the increasing income polarization that is occurring. Real people live in the short term and need some immediate relief. Such relief, however, will not change the system. Change can come in the middle run as those favoring one or another kind of successor system obtain sufficient strength to tilt the bifurcation in their direction.

Here is the danger of not going far enough in critical analyses of the system. Only if one sees clearly that there is no way out of persistent stagnation can one in fact become strong enough to win the moral and political struggle. One prong of the fork stands for the replacement of capitalism by another system that will be as bad or even worse, retaining the crucial features of hierarchy, exploitation, and polarization. The other prong stands for a new system that is relatively egalitarian and relatively democratic.

In the years to come, there may be upturns that seem to indicate that the system is functioning again. Even the level of employment in the system as a whole, the key measure of the state of the system, may rise. But such a rise cannot last long because the global situation is too chaotic. And the chaos paralyzes the readiness of both powerful entrepreneurs and simple persons to expend their remaining capital in ways that will risk loss and therefore their survival.

We are in for a wild ride and a very unpleasant one. If we are to behave sensibly, clarity of analysis is the first requirement, followed by moral choice, and political judgment. The bottom line is that we are way past the point in which there is any way that capitalism as a historical system can survive.

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**Workshop Analysis: “They Thought They Had Taken Power. In Reality They Were Taken By It.”**

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Συνέντευξη | ΑΛΒΑΡΟ ΡΕΓΙΕΣ, καθηγητής

# «Δεν κατέλαβαν την αυτή τις κατέλαβε»

Ο Ρέγιες αναλύει τις αντιφάσεις και τις ασυνέπειες των «προοδευτικών κυβερνήσεων» στη Λ. Αμερική, τη σχέση τους με τα κοινωνικά κινήματα, αλλά και την ενσωμάτωσή τους στην κυρίαρχη καπιταλιστική λογική. Οι επισημάνσεις του αποτελούν έναν πολύτιμο οδηγό για τις πάσης φύσεως αριστερές και προοδευτικές κυβερνήσεις και στη Δύση.

• Ποια είναι τα μαθήματα από την αντιφατική σχέση μεταξύ κοινωνικών κινήματων στη Λατινική Αμερική και των «προοδευτικών κυβερνήσεων», τις οποίες αυτά τα κινήματα βοήθησαν να έρθουν στην εξουσία;

Πιστεύω ότι στη Λατινική Αμερική τα κινήματα τις τελευταίες τρεις δεκαετίες, κυρίως αυτά των ιθαγενών λαών, ήταν πιο συνεκτικά και ριζοσπαστικά απ' ό,τι έχουμε δει μέχρι σήμερα οπουδήποτε αλλού. Το βασικότερο όμως είναι να καταλάβουμε ότι αυτή η σχέση μεταξύ κινήματων και «προοδευτικών κυβερνήσεων» στις περισσότερες περιπτώσεις

λων. Αυτό που δεν ήταν ξεκάθαρο τότε είναι ότι ο «νεοφιλελευθερισμός» ήταν περισσότερο ένα αντικειμενικό αποτέλεσμα, παρά μια υποκειμενική αιτία της χωρίς προηγούμενο αποσύνθεσης της καπιταλιστικής κοινωνικής μορφής. Σ' αυτό το πλαίσιο, της εμφανούς συρρίκνωσης της «αυτοαξιοποίησης της αξίας», ο αφανής δομικός δεσμός ανάμεσα σε μια διαρκώς μειούμενη καπιταλιστική ανάπτυξη και τις «προοδευτικές κυβερνήσεις» ήρθε στο προσκήνιο. Υπ' αυτές τις συνθήκες, η πολιτική τάξη έθεσε ξανά και με δυναμικό τρόπο σε λειτουργία και προσδιόρισε έναν νέο στόχο, ελπίζοντας ότι θα αποφύγει την κατάρρευση

Workshop for Intercommunal Study)

By Tassos Tsakiroglou (*Efimerida ton Syntakton*) [Original in Greek [Here](#)]

What are the lessons from the contradictory relationship between social movements in Latin America and the “progressive governments” that these movements helped bring to power?

I believe that the Latin American movements of the last three decades, particularly those of indigenous peoples, were far more cohesive and radical than anything we have yet to see elsewhere. All the more reason why it is important to understand that the relation of these movements to the “progressive governments” in most cases proved fatal. This disheartening outcome was due in no small part to an underestimation of the global political situation. That is, many of these movements framed their struggle as one against what they

understood as the effects of “neoliberalism”—an onerous debt crisis, austerity measures, and an interminable wave of privatizations. They consequently placed their energies on removing the traditional political class and bringing explicitly anti-neoliberal parties to power. After their wild success in these efforts it was difficult to understand why it was that, despite programs to alleviate the worst effects of “neoliberalism,” the motor behind those effects, an extremely inegalitarian and volatile form of capitalist accumulation, remained untouchable. In retrospect, and thanks to these struggles, it is easier to see that this impasse arose because the general strategy of the dominant strains of these movements had presumed that “neoliberalism” was a subjective political offensive on the part of elites that could be reverted through a subjective counter-offensive through existing state channels. What was not clear then is that “neoliberalism” was instead the *objective effect*, rather than a *subjective cause*, of the unparalleled decomposition of the capitalist social form. Within this context of the evident contraction of “the self-valorization of value,” the otherwise invisible structural tie between an ever-receding capitalist growth and “progressive government” came to the fore. Under these conditions the political class had been forcefully refunctionalized and assigned a new purpose—guarding “profitability” in the hopes of avoiding collapse. This in turn made it clear that the impersonal mechanisms of the market had become a direct, rather than indirect, constraint on state actors, leaving little room for “progressive” parties to respond to social demands for even moderate structural change. Given these constraints, and thus seeing structural demands as a threat, it is no surprise that the key figures of the “progressive governments” slowly moved to supplant and eventually neutralize the movements. In sum, although these counterhegemonic projects imagined that through the “progressive governments” they had “taken power,” in retrospect I don’t think it’s an exaggeration to say that in reality they had been taken by it.

Some of these “progressive governments” in Latin America continue to implement the same neoliberal “growth” policy of their political predecessors, i.e extractivism and exportism (exports orientation for the produced goods). How do you explain?

Exactly. Many of the “progressive governments” were able to paper over the net effects of this structural impasse of contemporary capitalism by taking advantage of windfall profits stemming from a rather unique and evidently unrepeatable global demand for natural resources. This “boom” created exceptionally high levels of regional economic growth and gave the “progressive governments” additional income with which to create state subsidies for the most marginalized sectors - both of which allowed the “progressive governments” to temporarily reduce the social conflict that otherwise accompanies a crisis. As we see today, the moment this “boom” came to an end these conflicts have reemerged with a vengeance.

What’s the role of the “programs against poverty” in the process of neutralization of mass social movements?



I would argue that the greatest damage was done by “progressive governments” at the level of fabricating and managing the subjective desires of the movement. That is, the movements that had shown such incredible political effectivity at removing the region’s traditional elites were through these programs encouraged to channel all social discontent into demands for consumption at the direct expense of the logic of social solidarity. Ironically then, by attempting to neutralize potential threats from the most marginalized sectors, the “progressive governments” simultaneously eroded the cohesion of the only social forces capable of confronting those on the right. In this sense the “progressive governments” not only decimated the movements but also undermined their own long-term viability.

Raul Zibechi claims that social change won’t be the outcome of government action, but of the mobilization and the fight of those “below and to the left”. What’s your point of view?

Well, let me first clarify that the concept of “below and to the left” comes from the Zapatistas. I think that it is important to mention this because they coined this concept in order to point out that given the structural constraints placed on the contemporary state by the decompositional dynamics of capital, they have concluded that today, “above and to the left” can exist only as an oxymoron. So yes, a fight of those “below and to the left,” but a fight for what? If it is simply a fight to influence or pressure those above, then the last 30 years of the Latin American experience shows us how such a mobilization is likely to end. In contrast, the Zapatistas insist that in the context of an increasingly generalized social abandonment, we must move beyond the cycle of demands, protests, elections, and broken windows that characterize so many movements around the world today. As an alternative, they suggest that those “below and to the left” must make the permanent exercise of self-government their single greatest strategic priority (with state engagement reduced to uneven tactical necessities). They believe that it is only by creating a new web of institutionality (at ever expanding levels of local, regional, supraregional, etc.)-in order to both exercise the capacity for collective decision-making and meet our pressing needs (food, housing, education)-that we might organize the social force necessary to revert the consequences of contemporary capitalism and move to make these new institutions the basis for a new society-wide order. It seems impossible, I know, but I think a sober look at our situation shows that nothing short of impossible will suffice.

What do the western countries have to learn from indigenous people’s culture about the relation between humans and nature and about the idea of progress?

I think what these peoples have to teach is absolutely vital, but I’m not sure it’s cultural. ‘Capitalist civilization’ (if we can speak in these terms) divided the world into a system of production and a system of enslavement and plunder. European descendent peoples were firmly within the protection provided by the categories of ‘worker’ and ‘citizen,’ while non-European people (more specifically Black and indigenous peoples) were most often objects

of colonialism and extermination. This 'civilization' is in the midst of an unmitigated involution and consequently the protections previously afforded to European descendant peoples are being nullified. Thus, European descendant people today have a choice: they can either lament this catastrophe and pretend to blame non-European peoples for their new condition, or they can become students of Black and indigenous peoples who were forced to learn to survive and resist *within* this catastrophe (that for them began five centuries ago) and together move to build a life after capitalist "growth."

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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 ordinary 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*[1] 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 disdain, 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).[5]

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 vivil 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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# Anselm Jappe: Politics Without Politics

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STUDENTS, USING TRASH CAN LIDS AS SHIELDS, MARCHING IN PARIS, FRANCE IN MAY 1968.  
MARC RIBOUD.

At first, the “primacy of politics” was a pet notion of Hitler’s jurist, Carl Schmitt. But for some time now the “radical” left has hitched its wagon to a “return of the political” in which “politics” *per se* is looked on as the polar opposite of the “market.” Must it be taken then as an article of faith that opposition to capitalism, or to its contemporary excesses, goes via what is commonly called politics? It is clear that nothing would have changed if Ségolène Royal, the 2007 French Socialist Party candidate for president, had been elected instead of rightist Nicolas Sarkozy. But even if the Trotskyists, who have taken over from the social democrats turned liberals, were to share power in France, they would not exactly rock the world to its foundations. In Germany, the “Party of Democratic Socialism” takes part in regional government; in Italy, *Rifondazione Comunista* had cabinet posts; even the Italian *Centri sociali*, often considered the cutting edge of dissent, send a few deputy mayors to city hall. Everywhere, these representatives of the “radical” left end up supporting neoliberal policies. Therefore, should “truly” radical parties be formed that would never sink into the

same quagmire? Or are the reasons for these “betrayals” structural? Does every involvement in politics inevitably lead to surrender to the market and its laws, regardless of any subjective intentions to the contrary?

It would therefore make sense to ask a basic question: what is meant by the term “politics”? The whole topic is home to a confusion similar to the one that bedevils “labor” and its critique. Criticising labor makes no sense at all if it is identified with productive activity as such, which is undoubtedly a fact of life present in every human society. But everything changes if by labor we understand what this word actually denotes in capitalist society: the self-referential expenditure of mere labor power regardless of its content. Thought of in this way, labor is an historical phenomenon that exists only in capitalist society and that can be criticized and eventually abolished. Indeed, the “labor” that all the actors on the political stage, left, right, and center, want to save is labor as understood in this narrow sense. Likewise, the concept of “politics” must be clearly defined. If it is identified with collective action, with the conscious intervention of men in society, with “love of the world” (Arendt), it is obvious that it enjoys unanimous support and that a “critique of politics” could only be understood as mere indifference to the world. But those who regularly advocate a “return to politics” have a much more specific idea of what “politics” is: the politics whose alleged disappearance causes them such serious withdrawal symptoms. The ritual evocation of “politics” as the only possible way to change the world is the core concept of today’s “left,” from the Bourdieusian sociologists to *Multitude*, from ATTAC to the “radical” electoral left. Despite their explicit intention to create a “completely different” politics, they still lapse into “realism” and the “lesser evil,” take part in elections, comment on referendums, discuss the possible evolution of the Socialist Party, seek to make alliances and seal some “historic compromise” or other. Faced with this desire to “play the game”—and almost always as a “representative” of some “interest”—movements and moments of radical opposition that embraced “anti-politics” should be recalled: from the historical anarchists to the artistic avant-gardes, from certain movements in the global South, such as *Critica Radical* in Fortaleza, Brazil, to the wildcat strike of May ’68 in France and the continuous state of insubordination in Italian factories during the 1970s. This “anti-politics” is just as far removed from the refusal of conscious intervention as “anti-art,” the rejection of art by Dadaists, Surrealists, or Situationists which was not a rejection of artistic means but, on the contrary, was conceived as the only way to remain faithful to the original intentions of art.

But can anyone seriously believe that politics is the social sphere that might allow limits to be placed on the market? Or that politics is “democratic” by nature and opposed to the capitalist economic world, where the survival of the fittest is the rule?

Modern capitalist society, based on the commodity and universal competition, requires a body that takes care of those public structures without which it could not exist. This body is the state, and politics, in the modern (and narrow) sense of the term, is the struggle to

assume control over the state. But this sphere of politics is not external or an alternative to the sphere of the commodity economy. On the contrary, it is structurally dependent on it. In the political arena, the object of contention is the distribution of the fruits of the commodity system—the workers' movement has essentially played this role—but not its actual existence. The visible proof: nothing is possible in politics that has not been previously “funded” by commodity production, and whenever the latter goes off the rails, politics becomes a clash between armed gangs. This kind of “politics” is a secondary regulatory mechanism within the fetishistic and unconscious commodity system. It is not a “neutral” body or a victory that opposition movements snatched from the capitalist bourgeoisie. Indeed, the bourgeoisie is not necessarily hostile to the state or the public sphere; that all depends on the historical moment.

Contemporary advocates of “politics” distort the original goal of “action” because they reduce it to mere tinkering with a machine which has come to be accepted as such. Today, “action” must face situations that are far too serious to be confronted with the out-dated means of politics. The new arena is that of a real anthropological transformation, which is both the result of over two centuries of capitalism and, in the course of the last few decades, of its increasingly visible programmed self-destruction. This regression is leading to *barbarisation*. Given the increasing frequency of incidents—such as the one involving teenagers who laughed as they used a camera phone to film a dead female classmate of theirs who had just been run over by a bus so that they could later upload the video to YouTube—it is somewhat inadequate to resort to unemployment, the casualization of labor, or the shortcomings of our schools as an explanation. Rather, we are witnessing a generalized, albeit inconsistent, “anthropological regression” which appears to be the product of a deep-seated collective mental disorder, of a narcissistic psychosis bequeathed by commodity fetishism and the relation it imposes on the way individuals interact with the world. No one can honestly offer any effective short-term remedies in the face of this crisis of civilization. Indeed, precisely because the situation is so serious, the circumstances call on us to do something, anything, right now, on the grounds that there is zero time for discussion and that *praxis* is better than theory. In this age of financial and molecular capitalism, Fordist-era forms of opposition will simply not do.

A precondition for reviving the prospect for action is to break clearly and definitively away from all “politics” in the institutional sense. Today, the only possible form of “politics” is radical separation from the world of politics and its institutions of representation and delegation, in order to invent and replace it with new forms of direct intervention. In this context, it seems pointless to confer with anyone who still wishes to cast their *vote*. Those who, almost 140 years after the introduction of universal suffrage, still flock to the ballot box, only deserve the words proclaimed by Octave Mirbeau in 1888,<sup>1</sup> or Albert Libertad in 1906.<sup>2</sup> The conquest of the universal franchise was one of the great battles of the historic left. The right-wing voter, however, is not such a fool: sometimes he gets the little he

expects from his candidates, even when it is not in the official platform of his party (for example, toleration of tax evasion and violations of labor laws). His representatives do not betray him too much; and the voter who only votes for the candidate who is going to hire their relative or obtain vast subsidies for the farmers in his district is, after all, the most rational voter. The left-wing voter is much more stupid: although he has never obtained what he has voted for, he persists. He has obtained neither great change nor scraps. He lets himself be lulled by mere promises. That is why those who voted for Berlusconi in Italy were by no means fools: they were not just seduced by television networks, as his opponents would have everyone believe. They obtained limited, but very real, benefits from their government (and above all from its *laissez-faire* policies). But to vote again for the left after their time in government—and on this score one can only side with Mirbeau—smacks of the pathological.

The rejection of “politics” thus conceived is not the product of a mannered taste for extremism. Faced with a threatening anthropological regression, to appeal to parliament is like trying to quell a hurricane with a religious procession. The only “realistic” proposals—in the sense that they could effectively change the course of events—are of the following kind: the immediate abolition, starting tomorrow, of all television. Is there a party in the world, however, that would dare to embrace such a proposal? What measures have been adopted during the last few decades that could really slow down the advance of barbarism? It will be said that a few small steps are better than nothing. But where have such steps actually been taken? Thirty years ago, those most undaunted laid down proposals for one television-free day a week. Today, there are hundreds of television channels for the asking. If nothing has managed to stop this continuous degeneration, it means that the goals and methods were wrong and that a complete rethink is required. And it is self-evident that this cannot be done by keeping the public sweet or by appearing on television.

There are some examples of anti-political action: the “volunteer wreckers of genetically modified crops,” especially those who operate at night, thus reviving the tradition of sabotage rather than resorting to media stunts, or actions seeking to put surveillance and biometric recognition equipment out of action. The residents of Val di Susa in the Italian Alps could be cited in this respect. On various occasions they have blocked the construction of a high-speed train line in their mountains. This prevalence of “defensive” struggles does not necessarily imply the absence of a broader perspective. On the contrary, these struggles against the worst “nuisances” help to keep such a perspective open. Against the dehumanization engineered by the commodity, which threatens to put a stop once and for all to any alternative, at the very least the *possibility* of future emancipation needs to be safeguarded. This may allow for new fronts and new alliances to be created. There are issues, such as the expropriation of individuals from their own biological reproduction, publicized under the rubric of “artificial fertilization techniques,” where the positions of the modernist left are so fully consonant with the delusions of technological omnipotence

entertained by contemporary capitalism that even the Pope's stance seems to acquire an air of rationality. The opposite of barbarism is humanization. This concept is real enough, but hard to define. A feasible "policy" nowadays would be defense of the minor victories that have been historically achieved on the road to humanization, and opposition to their abolition. Contemporary capitalism is not just the economic injustice that still lies at the heart of debate, and its list of misdeeds is not even complete with the environmental disasters it causes. It is also a dismantling—a "deconstruction"—of the symbolic and psychological foundations of human culture, which is especially evident in the process of dematerialization that electronic media have brought about. With regard to this aspect of the problem, it is of no importance whether it is Sarkozy or Royal, Besancenot or Le Pen whose face appears on the small screen.

Practice still needs to be reinvented without surrendering to the demand to "do something and do it quick," which always leads to a rerun of things that were already tried and found wanting. The real problem is general isolation—one that is above all mental—within the fetishistic forms of existence affecting the alleged adversaries as well as the supporters of the commodity system.<sup>3</sup> The struggle to break with these forms that are anchored in everyone's minds, to strip money and the commodity, competition and labor, the state and "development," progress and growth of their innocent air, relies on those "theoretical struggles" situated beyond the fixed opposition between "theory" and "*praxis*." Why should the analysis of the logic of the commodity or patriarchy be dubbed "merely" theory, whereas any strike for higher pay or any demonstration by students protesting because the university is not doing enough to prepare them for the world of work is labelled "*praxis*" or "politics"?

Thought and feeling precede men's action, and the way they act derives from what they think and feel. Changing the way men think and feel is already a form of action, of *praxis*. Once there is a clear idea, at least among a minority, of what the goals of an action are, things can rapidly unfold. May 1968 comes readily to mind in this regard, seemingly appearing out of the blue but in fact silently prepared by lucid minorities. On the other hand, we have often seen—and never more so than in the Russian Revolution—even the best opportunities for action lead in the absence of a clear theoretical grounding. Such clarification does not necessarily take place in books and conferences but must be present in people's minds. Rather than identify politics with the public institutions of commodity society, it could be identified with *praxis* in general. But this *praxis* must not be opposed to theory in some abstract way. The theory under discussion here is not the servant of *praxis*, nor its preparation, but an integral part of it. Fetishism is not a set of false representations; it is the entirety of forms—such as money—in which life *really* unfolds within a capitalist society. Every step forward in theoretical understanding, as well as its spread, is therefore in itself a practical act.



Naturally, the story does not end there. Future forms of *praxis* will no doubt be somewhat diverse and will also involve defensive struggles at the level of material reproduction (such as struggles against the casualization of labor and against the destruction of the Welfare State). While there is a need to break with “policies” that only offer to defend the commodification of the social categories constituted by fetishistic logic itself along the lines of say, “purchasing power,” it is nonetheless necessary to prevent capitalist development from destroying the basis of survival for large sectors of the population and generating new forms of poverty, which are often due more to exclusion than exploitation. Indeed, to be exploited these days has become almost a privilege compared to the fate of the masses of those who have been declared “superfluous to requirements” because they “are unprofitable” (i.e. they cannot be used profitably in commodity production). The reactions of the “superfluous,” however, take many different forms and may themselves tend towards barbarism. Victimhood is no guarantee of moral integrity. One fact is thus overriding all the others: the behavior of individuals in response to the vicissitudes of life within capitalism is not the mechanical result of their “social situation,” their “interests,” or their geographical, ethnic, or religious background, nor of their gender or sexual orientation. Nobody’s response to the collapse of capitalism into barbarism can be predicted. This is not because of the supposedly generalized “individualization” that sociologists are crowing over non-stop so as to sidestep all mention of the increasing standardization that it conceals. But the dividing lines are no longer created by capitalist development. Just as barbarism can arise anywhere, in Finnish high schools and African shantytowns, among yuppies and ghetto kids, among high-tech soldiers and unarmed rebels, so too can resistance to barbarism and the impulse for social emancipation arise anywhere (although with infinitely greater difficulty!), even where one would least expect it. While no single social *category* has squared with the forecasts of those who sought an agent of social emancipation, opposition to the inhuman conditions of life under capitalism is nevertheless always re-emerging. This landscape teeming with false friends and unexpected aid constitutes the present necessarily ill-defined terrain on which all “political recomposition” must now take place.

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## NOTES

1. “One thing fairly fills me with surprise. In fact, I’d even say that it leaves me dumbfounded, and that’s at the scientific moment in which I write, after countless experiences and daily scandals, there can still exist in our dear France [...] one voter, one single voter—that irrational, inorganic, hallucinatory animal—who agrees to take time out from his affairs, his dreams, and his pleasures in order to vote in favor of someone or something. If we think about it for just one instant, is this surprising phenomenon not one fit to upset the subtlest philosophies and confound reason? Where

is the Balzac who can give us the physiology of the modern elector, or the Charcot who will explain the anatomy and mentality of this incurable lunatic? ... He voted yesterday, he'll vote tomorrow, and he will always vote. Sheep go to the slaughter; they say nothing and expect nothing. But at least they don't vote for the butcher who will kill them and the bourgeois who will eat them. More bovine than cattle, more sheep-like than sheep, the elector names his butcher and chooses his bourgeois. He has fought revolutions in order to enjoy this right. ... So, my good man, go home and strike against universal suffrage" (Originally published in *Le Figaro*, November 28, 1888, and republished in Octave Mirbeau, *La Grève des électeurs*[The Electors' Strike] (Montreuil-sous-Bois: L'Insomniaque, 2007). This English translation available online at:

[www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/mirbeau/voters-strike](http://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/mirbeau/voters-strike). One hundred years after this call for a "voters strike," it is still possible, and necessary, to repeat the same arguments. Were it to be published now with a few name changes, anyone would think the text from which these lines are excerpted had been written today and not in the early days of the Third Republic. After more than a century, electors are clearly none the wiser, which, admittedly, does not amount to a very heartening state of affairs.

2. "The elector is the criminal ... The elector, the voter is you, the one accepting the status quo, the one whose support for the ballot-box sanctions all its misery, whose activity underwrites the enslavement it perpetrates ... You are a danger to we free men, we anarchists. In the danger you pose you are no different from tyrants, from the masters you choose, name, support, feed, protect with your bayonets, defend with your brute force, extol with your ignorance, legalise with your ballot papers and foist upon us by your idiocy ... If command-hungry and platitudinous candidates kowtow to your paper autocracy, if you get carried away by the incense and promises showered on you by those who have always betrayed, deceived and sold you off, it is because you are just like them ... Go on, vote! Trust your representatives, believe in your deputies, but stop complaining. You yourself have donned the yokes you bear, just as you commit the crimes whose consequences you suffer. You are master and criminal and yet ironically slave and victim too." Albert Libertad, *Le Culte de la charogne: Anarchisme, un état de révolution permanente (1897-1908)* [The Carrion Cult: Anarchism, A State of Permanent Revolution (1897-1908)] (Marseilles: Agone, 2006).
3. On the other hand, one of the new realities that anti-capitalist *praxis* must confront today is the blurring of borders between supporters and enemies of the system and in the dissemination of fragments of critical thought among numerous individuals who simultaneously participate fully in the ordinary business of this world: they read Marcuse and work in advertising, they manage businesses and donate money to the Zapatistas, they declare themselves anarchists and forge careers as administrators, etc. The need to live does not, however, imply a willingness to be played for a fool. A veritable "mithridatism" designed to arrest any awareness that might disrupt an individual life may be discerned here.

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Anselm Jappe

Born in Germany in 1962, ANSELM JAPPE is one of the key proponents of “the critique of value” school in France today. He is the author of several major works of critical theory, including *Guy Debord* (University of California Press, 1999), *Les Aventures de la marchandise: pour une nouvelle critique de la valeur* (Denoël, 2003), *Crédit à mort* (2011) and, with Robert Kurz, *Les Habits neufs de l’empire* (Lignes, 2004). He currently lectures in both art history and sociology in universities across France and Italy. “Politics Without Politics” is an excerpt from a forthcoming translation of *Crédit à mort* by Alastair Hemmens, John McHale, and Mike DeSocio.

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## Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi: The Coming Global Civil War: Is There Any Way Out?

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# Necro-Economy

Are we heading into the Third World War? Yes and no: war has been with us for the past fifteen years, it promises to be with us for a long time, and it threatens to destroy the last remnants of modern civilization. The exacerbation of xenophobia across the West and the rise of nationalism in countries like France are causes and effects of a looming war whose sources lie in the past two hundred years of colonial impoverishment and humiliation of the majority of the world population, not to mention neoliberal competition and the privatization of everything—including war itself.

Pacifism is becoming irrelevant as the conditions of war become irreversible. How can we oppose war when killers shoot at a peaceful crowd at a concert? War is becoming normal: the stock exchange no longer reacts to massacres, as its main concern is the looming stagnation of the world economy. After every armed attack, whether by Islamists or white supremacists, by random murderers or by well-trained fundamentalist killers, Americans run to buy more weapons. So weapons are not only increasing in the arsenals of nations, but also in the kitchens and bedrooms of everyday families.

A Republican assemblywoman from Nevada named Michele Fiore recently posted a Christmas family portrait on Facebook. At first glance, it's like any other holiday card, with three generations of a family in red shirts and jeans in front of a Christmas tree. Upon closer inspection, you see that Mrs. Fiore, her adult daughters, their husbands, and even one of her grandchildren are all holding firearms.

The privatization of war is an obvious feature of neoliberal deregulation, and the same paradigm has generated Halliburton and the Sinaloa Cartel, Blackwater and Daesh. The business of violence is one of the main branches of the global economy and financial abstraction does not discriminate criminal money from any other kind.

The process of externalization and privatization is now provoking a worldwide civil war that is feeding itself. According to Nicholas Kristof, "in the last four years more people have died in the United States from guns (including suicides and accidents) than Americans died in the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq combined."<sup>1</sup>



Michele Fiore, a Republican assemblywoman from Nevada, poses with her family for her Christmas card, 2015.

## Global Fragmentary Civil War

Are we heading toward a global war? Not exactly: no declarations of war are being issued, but innumerable combat zones are proliferating. No unified fronts are in sight, but fragmented micro-conflicts and uncanny alliances with no general strategic vision abound. "World war" is not the term for this. I would call it fragmentary global civil war.

And the fragments are not converging, because war is everywhere.

Now, as US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter claims, "destructive power of greater and greater magnitude falls into the hands of smaller and smaller groups of human beings."<sup>2</sup>

When war is privatized, no geopolitical order in the world can be imagined, no arrangement among the conflicting religious tribes can be pursued. No beginning and no end—an endless war, as Bin Laden promised. From the Paradise in which he certainly dwells, Mr. bin Laden must be looking upon the rise of the Caliphate of Death with a smile: so far, he can easily claim that the Army of Allah is winning the war.

Some American Republicans claim that the killings are related to mental illness. In a way, they are right. But they misunderstand the causes and the extent of what they label mental illness. Mental illness is not the rare malady of an isolated dropout, but the widespread consequence of panic, depression, precariousness, and humiliation: these are the sources of the contemporary global fragmentary war, and they are spreading everywhere, rooted in the legacy of colonialism and in the frenzy of daily competition.

Neoliberal deregulation has opened the way to a regime of worldwide necro-economy: the

all-encompassing law of competition has canceled out moral prescriptions and legal regulations. Since its earliest phases, Thatcher's neoliberal philosophy prescribed war among individuals. Hobbes, Darwin, and Hayek have all been summoned to conceptualize the end of social civilization, the end of peace.

Forget about the religious or ideological labels of the agents of massive violence, and look at their true nature. Take the Sinaloa Cartel and Daesh and compare them to Blackwater and Exxon Mobil. They have much more in common than you may think. Their common goal is to extract the maximum amount of money from their investments in the most exciting products of the contemporary economy: terror, horror, and death. Necro-capitalism is the emerging economic order of the world.

The narco business is a pillar of the Mexican economy, and in fact the head of the Sinaloa Cartel, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, was listed by *Fortune* magazine as one of the most prominent businessmen of 2012. Why not? After all, he is just a neoliberal entrepreneur who deals in deregulated kidnappings, drug trafficking, and murder.



Between 2009 and 2011, *Forbes* ranked "El Chapo," head of the Sinaloa drug cartel, the second most powerful man in Mexico, and respectively the 41st, 60th, and 55th most powerful man in the world.

Like neoliberal corporations investing money in the ultimate business, the Iraqi-Syrian caliphate and the Mexican narco army pay salaries to their soldiers, who are necro-proletarians. The narco business recruits unemployed young men from Monterrey, Sinaloa, and Veracruz. The caliphate recruits young men from the suburbs of London, Cairo, Tunis, and Paris, then trains them to kidnap and slaughter people at random. Daesh salaries have been estimated to be as much as one thousand US dollars a month. The group acquires this

money from ransom, oil, and taxes imposed on millions of Sunni people. They deliver a postmodern medievalism, but one that is not at all backwards. On the contrary, it is an anticipation of the future.

In a video released by Dubiq, the advertising agency of the Islamic State, the rhetoric is the same as any other type of advertising: buy this product and you'll be happy.<sup>3</sup> Multiple camera angles, slick graphics, slow motion, and even artificial wind give the whole thing a more dramatic mood: join the cause and you'll find friends, warmth, and well-being. Jihad is the best therapy for depression.

A message for feeble-minded people, for suffering people craving warmth, virile friendship, belonging. Not so different from the ads that we see every day in our city streets, only more sincere when it comes to the subject of suicide. Suicide is crucial in this video: 6,500 current or former US military soldiers commit suicide each year, according to Dubiq. While Americans die alone in anger and despair, God's soldiers die eager to meet some seventy virgins waiting in Paradise to fuck the warriors.

## **A Blueprint for Europe and the World**

Do you remember Yugoslavia? For some time, it was a rather healthy federation of twenty-five million people. Different ethnic and religious communities coexisted, factories were managed by workers, everybody had a privately owned house, and nobody suffered from hunger. Then came the International Monetary Fund, the Polish pope pushing Croats into religious war against the Orthodox Serbs, and Germany delivering weapons to the fascist Ustaša.

In 1990, the United States cut off all forms of credit to Yugoslavia unless separate elections were held in each state of the federation within six months. As a consequence, Yugoslavia—no longer able to conduct foreign trade—was condemned to commercial bankruptcy, which reinforced the divisive tendencies of its states. The US then funded the individual states to dissolve the federation, also supporting parties and movements that promoted this process. Meanwhile, Germany shipped arms to Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina.

In March of 1991, fascist organizations in Croatia called for the overthrow of the Socialist government and the expulsion of all Serbs from Croatia. On March 5, 1991, they attacked the federal army base at Gospić, and civil war began.

The extreme right-wing Croatian party Democratic Union, which used the flag, emblems, and slogans of the pro-Nazi Ustaša party, seized power. Citizenship, property rights,

employment, retirement benefits, and passports were granted only to Croats and to no other ethnic group. Thus, 300,000 Serbs armed themselves and entered the fray with unspeakable brutality.

The destruction of Yugoslavia can be seen as a return of Hitler's ghost to the world scene. Ethnic-religious wars caused around 170,000 casualties, as ethnic cleansing was practiced in every area of the federation. After seven years of violence, a new state order emerged based on a paradigm of ethnic-religious identification, a principle thought to have been extinct after the end of the Second World War and the defeat of Nazism.

Twenty years after the Nazi-neoliberal wars of Yugoslavia, in all those small nation-states (except perhaps Slovenia) unemployment is rampant, people are impoverished, schools are privatized, and public infrastructure is in disrepair. Today, the Yugoslavia of the Nineties may well be a blueprint for the European future: German Ordoliberalism has impoverished social life, depleted public services all over the continent, and inflicted humiliation on Syriza which has jeopardized the core of European solidarity.

The failure to deal with the new wave of migrants from the East has exposed the political fragility of the European Union, and now fuels a new outburst of fear, racism, shame, and bad conscience.

From the Balkans to Greece, from Libya to Morocco, are the ten million people amassing at these borders going to be the perpetrators of the next terrorist wave? Or will they be the victims of the next Holocaust?



Forensics experts work on exhuming and identifying Srebrenica victims, Bosnia and Herzegovina, July, 2005. Photo: Marco Di Lauro/Getty Images



# The Only Way Out

After the attacks in the center of Paris on Friday, November 13, a nervous French President declared: "The security pact takes precedence over the stability pact. France is at war."

Bin Laden's dream has been fulfilled. A small group of fanatics has provoked fragmentary global civil war. Can it be stopped?

In the present condition of perpetual economic stagnation, emerging markets are crumbling, the European Union is paralyzed, the promised economic recovery is elusive, and it is hard to foresee an awakening from this nightmare. The only imaginable way out of this hell is to end financial capitalism, but this does not seem to be at hand.

Nevertheless, this is the only prospect we can pursue in such an obscurantist time: to create solidarity among the bodies of cognitive workers worldwide, and to build a techno-poetic platform for the collaboration of cognitive workers for the liberation of knowledge from both religious and economic dogma.

A fragmented front of nationalist parties is gaining the upper hand: they oppose the euro currency and globalization, and they call for the restoration of national sovereignty. This front has assembled in the governing coalition of Hungary (which includes Nazis and authoritarian nationalists), in the Italian right-wing of Matteo Salvini, in the Polish government, in the anti-European British party UKIP, and in the rightist majority of the Bavarian CSU. This anti-euro front of European forces is converging with Russian nationalism under the authoritarian leadership of Putin and the banner of national populism and unrelenting Islamophobia.

After the humiliation of Syriza, the future of Europe is held captive by the opposition between financial violence and national violence. In order to grasp the dynamic that drives the global civil war, we first have to see the relation between the icy wind of financial abstraction and the reaction of the aggressive body of society separated from its brain.

The icy wind of financial abstraction is instilling in the European soul a sense of desolation that Michel Houellebecq has described in his books. *La soumission* (*Submission*) is a novel about the sadness that emerges from the vanishing of collective desire. Submission to the Supreme Entity (be it God or the market) is the source of the present gloom, and the source of the present war.

Globalization has brought about the obliteration of modern universalism: capital flows freely everywhere and the labor market is globally unified, but this has not led to the free

circulation of women and men, nor to the affirmation of universal reason in the world. Rather, the opposite is happening: as the intellectual energies of society are captured by the network of financial abstraction, as cognitive labor is subjugated to the abstract law of valorization, and as human communication is transformed into abstract interaction among disembodied digital agents, the social body is detached from the general intellect. The subsumption of the general intellect into the corporate kingdom of abstraction is depriving the living community of intelligence, understanding, and emotion.

And the brainless body reacts—on one side, a huge wave of mental suffering, and on the other side, the much-advertised cure for depression: fanaticism, fascism, and war. And at the end, suicide.

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## NOTES

1 Nicholas Kristof, “On Guns, We’re Not Even Trying,” *New York Times*, December 5, 2015

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2 Discussion with Secretary Carter at the John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum, Harvard Institute of Politics, Cambridge, Massachusetts, defense.gov, December 1, 2015 →

3 See →

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