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Work Refusal and Self-Organisation

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The widespread use of money and financial mechanisms against the working class provides us with great opportunities to elaborate critiques of both the money form of social domination and the possibilities for social organisation beyond exchange value – to critique both the price and money forms, and to open discussion on how to reorganise the genesis and distribution of wealth in society without money, prices or debt.¹

Stopping short of such discussion traps us in the Proudhonist strategy of monetary reformism. In the nineteenth century, when banks served only business and the rich, that strategy included dreams of mutual credit banks among workers; today it often means pressuring for local ‘community-based’ banks or creating micro-credit programs. Marx rejected nineteenth century socialist schemes for the democratisation of credit because, he argued, money, credit and debt are capitalist tools of exploitation and control. Rather than trying to appropriate them, they should be destroyed. In today’s world of consumer credit and mortgages, we know that we can struggle to use credit and debt for our own purposes at the same time that capital tries to use them to both extract interest and profit and enslave us in an endless cycle of borrowing to buy and working to pay off the debt. Marx showed a clear awareness of the class nature of credit and debt, of the way capital sought to use both against workers. We need an equally clear awareness of how they are still being used to control us, of the degree to which our use of them undermines that control, and of alternatives that move us beyond money, credit and debt altogether.

SOCIALISM?

One of the longest-standing critiques of capitalist development has been that of the socialists. From pre-Marxist analyses through to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Nikolai Bukharin

and Vladimir Lenin to Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro and, most recently, Hugo Chávez, socialists have lambasted the international expansion of capitalist social relations as a process that has brought misery rather than improvements in living conditions to the vast majority of the world's peoples. Rather than 'developing' the Third World, some socialists say, capitalism has 'underdeveloped' much of it – made things worse than they were when it was still 'undeveloped', that is, free from the imposition of capitalist class relations.

Yet, at the same time, socialists have consistently proposed the adoption of an alternative 'socialist development' based on the same processes of investment that put people to work, extract a surplus from that work, and reinvest it to impose more work. The primary difference is that in 'socialist development' *government* plans and organises most of the investment. From the Soviet Union's extraction of an agrarian surplus to finance industrialisation to the current Venezuelan Government's appropriation and reinvestment of oil profits, the process remains approximately the same no matter the rhetoric in which these processes are cloaked.

Some critics, such as Friedrich Hayek in *The Road to Serfdom*, have argued that, even though the concept of socialism can be separated from the experience of self-proclaimed socialist states in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the *concept* has always had a totalitarian side to it.² That side has derived, they argue, from the misguided notion that investment, economic growth and social development can be planned more efficiently than they can be regulated by the market, which automatically synthesises supply and demand in such a fashion as to best satisfy consumer desires, given the scarce resources available. Planning, they have said, cannot achieve the same results because, first, there are just too many decisions to be made and, second, planning has always meant there must be those with the power to plan, and such a concentration of power must lead, and has always led, to both inept and totalitarian government. This critique, of course, ignores that planning occurs all the time in so-called private enterprise capitalism, at many levels: within and among corporations, by national governments and by supra-national state institutions such as the World Trade Organization. All of these actors, as well as others such as labour movements and consumer groups, have sought to plan the evolution of both supply and demand, the basic components of the market. In short, the 'plan' versus 'market' dichotomy was a fiction that served both ideological sides of the Cold War.

While the concept of socialism has certainly mutated repeatedly over time, meaning many different things to many different people, it seems that within all its history two contradictory meanings struggled with each other. The first is a tradition that honours intentional social and economic planning over the supposedly automatic adjustments of capitalist markets. The second is a tradition that believes human beings can cooperate to jointly determine their collective future in ways far superior to those possible under the regime of capitalist exploitation and the mix of markets and planning associated with it.

For a long time the idea of socialism was a dream that evolved in Western Europe simultaneously with the development of capitalism and its industrial revolution. Dissatisfied with the coexistence of outrageous wealth and abject poverty, appalled by the destruction of traditional communities with all their intimate personal bonds and their replacement by individualism and the competitive war of all against all, offended by ugly cities crammed with dark factories and dank dwellings, dismayed by the displacement of craft skills by a crippling division of labour, many workers and social reformers yearned for a better world.

Struggles to transform their world, either in large, through reform or revolution, or in small, through the founding of experimental communities, were based on such dreams of a better world. Apparently the Frenchman Pierre Leroux, a disciple of Henri de Saint-Simon, first used the term '*socialisme*' in 1832 in his journal *La Globe*. It was also used in the 1830s in Britain by the followers of the reformist mill owner Robert Owen.

From Saint-Simon and Owen onward, socialists condemned the destructive antagonisms and anarchy of free-market competitive capitalism. Rather, they emphasised the naturalness and possibilities inherent in human cooperation and solidarity at the social level. They believed that people could learn to cooperate, to work *for* each other instead of *against* each other, to conceive their self-interest more broadly in terms of their community instead of narrowly and egotistically.

Yet, at the same time, even the concepts of Saint-Simon and Owen contained an elitist dimension. Owen was a reform-minded capitalist who theorised and practised 'socialism-from-above'. Saint-Simon's concept of socialism, even more than Owen's, called for centralised, top-down planning by 'those most qualified'. The elitist proclivities of these two founding socialists were not entirely inconsistent with the even more radical communist tradition of the time and the belief in the necessity of highly centralised and tightly

controlled governance of their alternative communist society. Even Karl Marx's closest collaborator, Frederick Engels, believed that any complex division of labour demanded a central 'authority' to plan and oversee its operation.

MARX

Marx's own analysis of exploitation and alienation in capitalism led him to believe that the working-class overthrow of capitalism would not only lead to workers' control of production and distribution, but also to the overcoming of all the aspects of alienation inherent in the capitalist use of work as its fundamental mechanism of social control. Exactly how this would be done he did not pretend to know; he merely pointed to existing struggles to see what kinds of changes workers would bring about, for example shorter and safer work time (see Box 3.1).

Marx clearly believed that once workers were in command of the means of production they could transform it so that their products would once again be an expression of their own will (instead of that of their capitalist bosses). Then work itself could become an interesting activity of individual and collective self-realisation (instead of a source of alienation) so that a real flowering of self-organised cooperation would replace the conflicts among workers that has been so much the basis of capitalist control.

At the same time, his understanding of both the role of imposed work in capitalism and the long history of the workers' struggle to reduce it led him to write in his *Grundrisse* that, in post-capitalist society, free time as the basis for the 'full development of individuality' would replace labour as the source of value in society.³ Thus, post-capitalist society would most likely be characterised, at least in part, by the open-endedness of 'disposable time'; an expanding sphere of freedom would allow the many-sided development of the individual and of society.

The conflict in socialist thought between the desire to foster a new kind of social cooperation and a tendency to turn to elitist methods did not disappear with the development of Marxism but only took on greater ambiguity due to the vagueness of Marx's more abstract discussions of issues of revolutionary power. Marx and Engels had both argued, from their earliest writings, that revolution could bring the abolition of the capitalist subordination of human life to endless work and the tyranny of the market. Their alternative was planning on a social scale of both production and

distribution. But what kind of planning? Sometimes they spoke of such planning being accomplished by ‘the whole of society’, sometimes by ‘associated producers’. Sometimes, they called for the takeover and management of various sectors of the economy by the state. However, Marx’s analysis of the Paris Commune laid out in *The Civil War in France* emphasised how the ability of workers to recall their representatives and the avoidance of any concentration of military power that could be used against the workers were themselves steps in the abolition of the state.⁴

POST-MARX

The central debate in the Second International (1889–1914), which was a renewed attempt to organise a worldwide socialist movement, was over the best method for overthrowing capitalism. Neither side of this debate – on the one hand, electoral and gradual social reform, and, on the other hand, preparing workers for revolution – called for the socialist party to abdicate its leading role in political struggle. The debate was over *how*, not whether, it should lead.

With the October Revolution and their seizure of power, the Bolshevik party leadership moved with blinding speed to consolidate all power into the hands of the party. While the meaning of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ may have been ambiguous in Marx, there was no ambiguity at all for the Bolsheviks. Anarchists, such as Emma Goldman, and radical communists, such as Rosa Luxemburg and those who would become known as ‘council communists’, saw in the dismantling of the workers’ factory committees and soviets, the solidification of a Bolshevik state, a reconcentration of power antithetical to their concepts of popular power. The anarchists and radical communists called for democracy and the subordination of the party to the workers’ own institutions.

Over the following decades the nationalisation of industry, the police-state imposition of strict industrial labour discipline, the collectivisation of the peasantry and finally the forced labour of the Gulag – all carried out in the name of the people – were the forms taken by Soviet-style socialism. Beneath the veneer of socialist rhetoric was a different method of organising the accumulation of capital, variously referred to as ‘state capitalism’, ‘bureaucratic collectivism’, or ‘state socialism’.

Every effort to actually construct a socialist society seems to me to have reproduced one of the most fundamental characteristics of the kind of society that it is supposed to replace. That characteristic

is the essence of what has always been meant by domination: the imposition of a universal set of rules and the subordination of social diversity to a standard measure. Indeed, when we look closely at the mechanisms socialists have designed for regulating their alternative social systems, we find that their attempts to correct the injustices of capitalism have remained trapped in the capitalist practice of measuring everything in terms of labour and money – in short, in that social reductionism that is so characteristic of capitalism.

At an earlier time, Marx had rejected utopian plans for substituting ‘labour chits’ (or ‘time-chits’ or ‘labour money’) for cash money because, he argued, the substance of money value in capitalism was already labour.⁵ Labour chits, therefore, would simply be a primitive form of money and likely to evolve into all too familiar forms. He imagined instead the communist abolition of all kinds of money along with the dramatic reduction of labour time and the substitution of the direct distribution of collectively produced wealth among the producers. However, in the history of post-Marx socialism, the desire to create a new system led many to maintain labour and money as the standards and measures of value. Not surprisingly, they also reproduced the practice of making the very mechanism of domination through endless labour into a virtue, with the socialist version of the work ethic differing from the Calvinist/capitalist one only in its secular trappings.

As the one overarching goal of socialist development became capital accumulation through endless labour, the openness to social, cultural and ethnic diversity that was at least implicit in Marx’s notion of the transcendence of labour value by an indeterminate free time has been both ignored and contradicted. Socialism as a homogenous and unified social system became the master narrative. Only later in the twentieth century did some Marxists seek to recuperate and explore the possibilities of real multilateralism in post-capitalist society.

The origins of top-down, centrally planned concepts of socialism lay within the bias of Marxist-Leninists (and the ‘critical theorists’ of the Frankfurt School) to focus on the power of capital, to see workers as essentially reactive to mechanisms of oppression and, therefore, to think that they depended on some kind of outside leadership (of the party or of intellectuals) to mobilise them for revolution. Such an approach inevitably fails to study our ability to rupture those mechanisms, to throw the system into crisis and to recompose social structures. As a result, even their theoretical

understanding has remained one-sided, and more of a paean to capitalist power than a useful tool for us in our struggles.

The political importance of placing *our* abilities at the centre of our thinking about the class conflicts of capitalism, about the dynamics of the development of those conflicts, is revealed by the simple consideration that only on the basis of an accurate appraisal of our existing abilities (and their limits) can we usefully debate how to proceed best in our efforts to transcend capitalism and build new worlds.

For example, outsourcing, or the mobility of fixed capital associated with free trade – production facilities being moved from country A to country B with the products then shipped back to country A – can be seen as another clever capitalist ploy to increase profits by replacing those of us with higher wages by those of us with lower wages. There is obviously truth to this view. However, outsourcing can also be seen as capital *fleeing* the ability of those of us who have been able to impose higher wages and as our ability, in conjunction with the struggles of immigrants who had previously been used against us, to impose rigidities, high costs of production and less work. Seeing things from this latter angle allows us to understand how it was that hundreds of groups of those of us struggling in Canada, the United States of America and Mexico were able to link up quickly in new forms of continental-scale organisation to oppose the North American Free Trade Agreement and to subsequently help form the alter-globalisation movement. This activity, it should be noted, has taken place largely outside traditional trade unions or parties. We should neither be surprised nor attempt to squeeze such organisation into old moulds. On the contrary, a new global class composition calls for us to find new forms of organising.

TRANSCENDING CAPITALISM

There are many different issues involved in the general notion of ‘transcending’, or going beyond, the current social order. Peter Kropotkin, the deepest and most creative thinker of all the Russian revolutionary anarchists, was acutely aware of both the practical issues of political struggle and the more abstract issue of the character of human social evolution. To provide a general understanding of the latter, Kropotkin pursued research on ‘mutual aid’ to provide a foundation for his anarcho-communist politics.

He aimed to demonstrate that there was an inherent tendency in human society, as well as in a variety of other animal species, for individuals to cooperate with other members of their species and help each other rather than to compete in a war of all against all.⁶ He traced the manifestation of the 'law of mutual aid' down through history. He found it sometimes triumphant, sometimes defeated, by the contradictory forces of competition and conflict but always present and providing the foundation for recurrent efforts at cooperative, self-emancipation from various forms of domination (the state, institutional religion, capitalism). He was able to cut through the rhetoric and the reality of competition to perceive and demonstrate the omnipresence of social cooperation at all levels of society (see Box 3.2).

Various revolutionary tendencies have drawn on Marx's work but insisted on the primacy of the self-activity and creativity of people in struggles against capitalism outside and against the Soviet conversion of revolution into state capitalism and of Marxism into an ideology of domination. They have tended to reconceptualise the process of transcending capitalism in ways similar to Kropotkin's.

AUTONOMIST MARXISM AND SELF-VALORISATION

It was my discovery of a recurrent insistence by some Marxists on the autonomy of working-class self-activity, not only vis-à-vis capital but also vis-à-vis trade unions and the party, that led me to coin the term *autonomist* Marxism to designate this general line of reasoning and the politics associated with it. Autonomist Marxists have argued that the process of revolution is seen either as the work of the people or as being doomed from the start. The emphasis on working-class autonomy has led, in turn, to a reinterpretation of Marxist theory that has brought out the two-sided character of the class struggle and shifted the focus from capital (the preoccupation of orthodox Marxism) to workers, to us.

That shift has led to many new perceptions, such as the recognition that 'working class' is a category of capital, a condition that people have struggled to avoid or to escape. Not only has there been recognition that capitalism seeks to subordinate everyone's life to work – from the traditional factory proletariat to peasants, housewives and students – but also that all those peoples' struggles involve both resistance to this subordination and the effort to construct alternative ways of being. The recognition of

such phenomena has led autonomist Marxists to the same kind of research that Kropotkin pursued.

They have developed a systematic Marxist analysis of working-class autonomy that has evolved from a study of how the pattern of capitalist development was determined by working-class negativity (blocking and forcing changes) to the study of the positive content of those struggles (which capital seeks to stem or co-opt). One autonomist Marxist in Italy, Mario Tronti, has reminded us that for Marx capital (dead labour) was essentially a constraint on the working class (living labour).⁷ The living, inventive force within capitalism is the imagination and self-activity of workers, not of capitalists. When in the late 1960s and 1970s that creative self-activity exploded throughout the social factory in a myriad of social, cultural and political innovations in Italy, Antonio Negri took a relatively obscure term, 'self-valorisation', which had been used by Marx to talk about the self-reproduction of *capital*, and gave it a new meaning: the self-development of the *working class*.⁸

Negri's term 'self-valorisation' not only gave a name to the positive content of the struggles in Italy but refocused our attention on the ways in which workers not only struggle *against* capital but also *for* a variety of new ways of being. It provided a point of departure for rethinking the content of our struggles and some fundamental issues, such as the nature of revolution and of the 'transition' to post-capitalist society. As Marx had done in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Negri stressed that the creation of communism is not something that comes later but is repeatedly launched by current developments of new forms of working-class self-activity.⁹

There are problems with this term because the self-valorisation of the working class is not homologous with that of capital, and more recently Negri has drawn on both his own and Gilles Deleuze's work on Spinoza to speak in terms of 'constituent power'.¹⁰ But in both cases the point has been to focus attention on the existence of autonomy in the self-development of workers vis-à-vis capital. For too long the development of the working class had been seen by Marxists as merely derivative of the development of capital. Other Marxists (see the online journal *The Commoner*) refer to the activities thus constituted to some identifiable degree outside and beyond capitalist social relationships as forming new dimensions of our 'commons' – harkening back to all the commons (of grazing lands, forests, parks, waters, knowledge, etc.) shared by members of communities that capital has repeatedly sought to enclose and privatise.

Because these terms have been developed in a way that conceptualises self-valorisation or constituent activity not as unified but as diverse, they provide a theoretical articulation of the tradition within autonomist Marxism of recognising the autonomy not merely of the working class but of various sectors of it. To both recognise and accept diversity of self-valorisation, rooted like all other activity in the diversity of the peoples seeking to escape capitalist domination, implies a whole politics, one that rejects traditional socialist notions of post-capitalist unity and redefines the 'transition' from capitalism to communism in terms of the elaboration from the present into the future of existing forms of self-valorisation or commons. Communism is reconceptualised in harmony with Kropotkin's views, not as a some-day-to-be-achieved utopia but as a living reality whose growth needs only to be freed from constraint.

Like Kropotkin's studies, such efforts to discover the future in the present were based not only on a theory of collective subjectivity but also on empirical studies of real workers in action. These researches have explored moments of class conflict and working-class self-activity, such as the workers' councils created during the 1956 Hungarian revolution, students' and women's movements, and the struggles of peasants and the urban poor in Mexico in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In a growing number of cases, the research has focused on new forms of social cooperation. As with Kropotkin, some of the clearest results have come from the study of rural areas, of the self-activity of peasants in their villages. But others have come from urban struggles, for example those of students squatting in buildings to create autonomous centres of youth activism and innovation.

At the same time, networking has provided the means to circulate both information and struggle in ways that extend the notion of community, and therefore of the 'commons', far beyond the isolated locality, even beyond national frontiers. In Mexico, such networks have been called 'hammocks' because, rather than trapping the participant, they are adaptable to the specificities of local needs and projects.

Some Italian and French theorists of working-class autonomy have suggested that a new diversity of subjectivities that rupture capitalist control and continue to defy its present efforts at subordination represents the emergent possibilities of liberation. An early characterisation was that of a new 'tribe of moles', a loose community of highly mobile, drop-out, part-time workers, part-time

students, participants in the underground economy, creators of temporary and ever-changing autonomous zones of social life that forced a fragmentation of and crisis in the mass-worker organisation of the social factory. A more recent characterisation is that of 'multitude', also drawn from Spinoza, and used by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and by Paolo Virno.¹¹

Whatever concept one uses to talk about our struggles, it has become increasingly clear that within the interpersonal interactions and exchanges of information associated with the 'computer and informational society' is an increasingly collective appropriation of, and control over, communication. Indeed, from almost the beginning, computer communication networks have been constructed by people for their own uses. Originally created and operated to facilitate the development of technology at the service of capital, contemporary networks have been largely constructed by the collectivities that use them. They retain the material stamp of that autonomy in their uncentralised and fluid technical organisation and constitute a terrain of constant conflict between capitalist attempts at appropriation and the fierce allegiance of most users to freedom of use and 'movement' throughout the cyberspace they have created and constantly recreate as moments of their own self-activity, online and off.

A myriad of participants of networks operate from personal or institutional (academic, corporate or state) entry points, using and elaborating the technology in pursuit of their own collective interests. The constitution of a proliferating network of networks – almost totally devoted both to the subversion of the current order and to the elaboration of autonomous communities of like-minded people connected in non-hierarchical, rhizomatic fashion purely by the commonality of their desires – has been striking. Remarkably, the proliferation of the 'personal' computer rapidly evolved into a gateway of communication and mobilisation linking often-isolated individuals into social movements. The modem and the spread of communication nets are providing the sinew of large-scale collective social cooperation in dramatic ways.

NORTH VERSUS SOUTH

Capitalism has always been a global system. The story of imperialism is only very partially the story of the rip-off of wealth, of the opening of markets and of the acquisitions of outlets for capital. All of these are but moments in the global process of turning the world's

peoples into workers and then dividing and redividing them with the aim of controlling them all. In the nineteenth century Indian weavers had their thumbs cut off to maintain jobs in British mills. A century later Asian and Latin American workers would be put to work in relocated mills while North American and Northern European textile workers were laid off. These are not just different stages in capitalist development; these are changes in the global class composition in response to changing patterns of our struggles.

We must understand the policies of nation states in terms of the changing balances of class power. Why have some parts of the world been 'developed' while others remained 'undeveloped' or have been 'underdeveloped'? This has happened because an international wage and income hierarchy is necessary for the control of the class globally and in the developed areas some of us could be put to work profitably and in others we could not. What many have repeatedly failed to recognise is how many of us in 'underdeveloped' areas have often *refused* to work for capital on its terms, that is, profitable terms. In such circumstances the absence of capitalist development has been a measure of our strength, not just of our relative weakness (for example, our inability to command a high wage). The international counterpart of seeing those of us working in the North as victims is looking at those of us elsewhere, those of us at the bottom of the international wage and income hierarchy, as simply exploited and oppressed.

Indeed, 'development' and 'underdevelopment' are misleading terms, not only because they designate processes as well as states of being, but also because they designate strategies. De-industrialisation and industrialisation occur as moments in changing rhythms of class struggle, shifting balances of power within a whole as the integrity of that whole is repeatedly threatened by assaults at all levels of the hierarchy. No analysis of the current crisis in capitalist power can be useful that does not grasp the specificities of local variations within the broader context. Capital operates at a global level, so our struggles occur everywhere, and anti-capitalist strategies, like capitalist strategies, must be formulated and implemented globally.

Multinational capital organises itself through the multinational corporation, interstate relations and supranational state forms, such as the International Monetary Fund. None of these are appropriate for us, but we must organise the international circulation of our struggles on a global level. Think globally and act locally is not enough; our local actions must be complementary and that does not necessarily happen automatically. We have achieved comple-

mentarities before, for instance the anti-apartheid movement or simultaneous alter-globalisation protests; we must continue to invent ever more effective new approaches.

ZEROWORK; REFUSAL OF WORK

What I have been arguing for some time now is that we get a totally different vision, a different reading of Marxist theory and a different politics of the overthrow and replacement of capitalism, when we focus on the substance of the social relationships of capitalism: work. Capitalism is not just a social system that exploits people through work, such that we can think about ending the exploitation and keeping the work; it is a social system that tends to subordinate all of life to work and, by so doing, alienates those of us forced to work and prevents us from developing our own paths of self-realisation. The subordination of our lives to work means not only that we are forced to work many intense hours – so many hours that we have little time and energy left over for other activities – but also that those other activities tend to be reduced to the mere recreation of our lives as labour power, so that we are willing and able to work.

For example, the *waged* know that during each day of our usual working week (Monday to Friday for many) most of our waking hours are taken up working directly for capital on the job. But we also find that much of our supposedly ‘free’ time or ‘leisure’ time is taken up preparing for work, getting to work, getting home from work, recuperating from work, doing what is necessary so that we can go back to work the next day, and so on. For those of us who are not waged, for example the *unwaged* in the home (usually housewives but often children and sometimes men), ‘leisure’ time turns out to be mostly dedicated to *housework*, which in turn is not just crafting and reproducing domestic life but involves the work of turning our children into workers and reproducing ourselves as workers.

In other words, women have children but then they (along with husbands sometimes) must rear them to take orders, to curb their desires and spontaneity and to learn to do as they are told (the same work that teachers undertake in schools). As children we are not left free to discover life on our own but are put to *schoolwork*, *homework* and *housework* – the work of turning ourselves into *workers*, as well as reproducing our parents as workers. Similarly, adult housework reproduces labour power daily and weekly

through shopping, cooking, feeding, washing clothes and cleaning the house, and the provision of sexual and psychological services (from patching up job-damaged egos to absorbing abuse), all of which is necessary for us to return to work each day without shooting the boss, ourselves or our loved ones. Parallel analyses can be made of the 'free' time on weekends and vacations. In short, I'm arguing not merely that capital has extended its mechanisms of domination beyond the factory but that those mechanisms involve the imposition of work, including *the imposition of the work of reproducing life as work*.

The recognition of how capital has sought to impose work outside waged work must be accompanied by the same understanding of its rule in waged work: namely that imposition always involves struggle. Just as we have resisted the imposition of work inside the factory or office, via slowdowns, strikes, sabotage and *détournement*, so too have we resisted elsewhere the reduction of lives to work. At this point autonomist theory gets beyond the dead end of critical theory. Instead of becoming fixated on capitalist hegemony, on detailing the thoroughness and completeness of capitalist domination, we must recognise, study and then articulate our ability to struggle against our reduction to mere worker. Precisely because capital seeks to intervene and shape all of life, all of life rebels, each nook and cranny of life becomes a site of insurgency against this subordination.

Housewives go on strike in the home or march out of it collectively into the streets. Students take over classes and schools or create 'free universities' of liberated learning opportunities outside the institutions. Peasants refuse to subordinate their production (and thus their work) to the market and collaborate to build networks of mutual aid. The 'unemployed' refuse to look for waged jobs. 'Culture' becomes a terrain of the fiercest struggle between liberating self-activity and its recuperation or instrumentalisation by business. And so on.

What the recognition of all this means is not only that the class struggle is omnipresent but also that *the struggles of those of us who are waged and the struggles of those of us who are unwaged are inherently related through the common refusal of work, that is, the refusal of the reduction of our lives to work, and the struggle for alternative ways of being*. Thus the Old Left definition of the working class as the waged proletariat is obsolete, not only because capital has integrated the unwaged into its self-reproduction, but also because the struggles of the unwaged are integrally related to, and can be complementary to, those of the waged.

Yet at the same time the struggles for alternative ways of being that escape the reduction of life to work are diverse. Unlike the older Marxist notions of replacing capitalism with some kind of homogenous socialism, we must recognise communism as a diversity of alternatives. Revolution involves explosion, the escape from reductionism, rather than the substitution of one unified plan for another. Here is the importance of the autonomy of the struggles of different groups of people seeking to avoid the reduction of their lives to labour.

Most interpretations of Marxist theory, especially of the labour theory of value, fail to recognise how Marx's theory was a *labour* theory not because he worshiped labour as the only source of value in society, but because the universal conversion of life into labour was, and is, the capitalist means of domination. Other class societies involved some forcing of others, such as serfs in feudalism and slaves in many ancient societies, to work, but never had the world seen a society wherein life was redefined as work. Many accurately read Marx's analysis of *alienation* as a critique of the capitalist perversion of work, concluding that socialism and communism involved freeing work from that perversion.

Where they have gone wrong, in my opinion, is that they think Marx focuses on work because he believes unalienated work is the be-all and end-all of human existence, that work defines humanity. Instead, we should see that it made sense for Marx to focus his analysis on work because of its centrality to capitalist domination. He recognised that people struggle against work not merely because it is exploitative but because *there is more to life than work*.¹²

The qualitative transformation of work under capitalism into alienation comes not merely from its organisation but from its *quantitative extension*. The central issue in the transcendence of labour value toward value as disposable time must be the reduction of labour time. Again and again Marx's evocation of post-capitalist society involves the image of the individual and the collectivity doing many things, not just working. The transcendence of alienation can only come with such a quantitative reduction of work that work becomes one, among other, integral aspects of a richly diverse human existence. The liberation *of* work can come only with the liberation *from* work, that is, from the capitalist reduction of life to work. Once we see these things, we are freed from the productivism of all the old socialist illusions; we are free to think about struggle, revolution and freedom in terms of the simultaneous demotion of

work from the centre of life and its restoration as one means, among others, of fulfilling human development.

The development of the 'refusal of work' as an explicit demand in Italy in the 1960s was an important reminder that the working class has always struggled against work. Sometimes the reduction of work, the liberation of life from work, has been an explicit demand, as in the fight for the ten-hour or eight-hour day, or for the five-day working week. Between 1880 and 1940 workers' struggles in the United States chopped weekly working hours in half and created the weekend. In the early 1970s in the United States, new demands, this time for a four-day week, surfaced only to be driven from the agenda and replaced by demands for overtime by rising unemployment and falling wages. In Europe, workers have fought for, and won, reductions in weekly working hours from forty or more to thirty-six hours. At other times, especially when the official labour movement has been acting as the labour relations arm of business, such demands have been suppressed and remained hidden from view, observable only in the passive resistance, absenteeism and worker sabotage in everyday life.

A great many social conflicts can be understood in terms of the struggle against work, even when the protagonists have not articulated their demands in those terms. Many student revolts have amounted to a refusal to do the work of creating labour power, mere job training, accompanied by a demand for the time and opportunity to study things that meet student needs rather than the needs of business. Much of the revolt of women can be seen as a refusal to play their traditional roles in the social factory as procreators and re-creators of labour power, accompanied by demands for new kinds of gender and other social relations. The revolts of blacks, or Chicanos, or immigrants in the streets of American cities have not been just a cry of desperation but a rebellion against the roles assigned to them within accumulation: on the margins, as part of the reserve army that made the labour market function, moving in and out of the lowest-paid jobs, living under subsistence conditions, excluded from political participation, and so on. Theirs was a rejection of particular kinds of work, just like that of students and women, but a rejection of work all the same. The struggle against work spreads with its imposition so that it is possible to explore the variety of both refusal and activities that are substituted for work, and thus the changing relationship between work and non-work.

Let's look at this analytically. We know that high rates of unemployment have often been an integral part of capital's response

to crisis imposed on it by our struggles, in which the struggle against work has played a critical role. It was a familiar strategy throughout the nineteenth century right up to the 1930s, when an enormous cycle of our forebears' struggles achieved the power to eliminate it for a time. Their struggles forced the generalised adoption of Keynesianism, in which unemployment was demoted to a secondary, marginal tactic, at least in the North. This lasted until my generation undermined Keynesianism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Unfortunately, the pattern of the development of the crisis has been such that we have *not* had the power to prevent the redeployment of unemployment as a weapon, which was first done massively in the Carter-Volcker-Reagan depression of the early 1980s and is now being done again at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. But what kind of weapon is it? When we lose our waged jobs we are not freed from work! We are supposed to go on doing the work of reproducing labour power *and* to make the labour market function by looking for waged jobs.

Part of *our* effort must be to make these dynamics clear so that we can struggle for what we really want, which is a secure income and less work-for-capital so that we have more time to re-craft our lives. Thus, instead of demanding 'full employment' and strenuously searching for new jobs, we can demand less restrictive and more unemployment compensation or even 'citizen wages' independent of jobs. By minimising job searching we can maximise the time we have available to do things more in our own interests. When we return to waged jobs we continue the struggle against work, albeit all too often less intensely because we now have a greater fear of losing the wage. The ability of the unwaged to demand and get income buttresses the ability of the waged to refuse work. As I say, this is an old game: we know the rules, they are pitted against us, but they are not impossible to fight.

When we examine the history of the struggle against work, we discover various ways in which our predecessors have fought. The Luddites smashed the machines that they saw as responsible for their loss of the wage. It didn't work very well, though it wasn't as crazy as some have claimed. Later, workers explicitly linked the struggle against work with the issue of unemployment to demand that all available work and wages should be spread over the entire labour force. A reduction in the working day or week could be the means to spread less work and share wages. Such arguments have been made by Andre Gorz in his *Farewell to the Working Class* and Jeremy Rifkin in *The End of Work*, suggesting that capital has substituted

machinery for labour so much that it simply cannot create enough 'full time' jobs to employ everyone.¹³ Whatever its limitations, such as not recognising how higher unemployment for the waged has been accompanied by more work for the unwaged, this argument has the virtue of refusing to fall back into the traditional left-wing demand for 'full employment', which just reiterates the fundamentals of capitalism.

Arguments about the need to 'spread the work' played an important role in struggles during the nineteenth century and the 1930s, and helped mobilise support for the reduction of work. The limits of such demands are in the continuing acceptance of the legitimacy of work within capitalism, that is, ignoring its role of domination, rather than being geared to meeting people's needs. Re-situated within a more thoroughgoing critique of all forms of waged and unwaged work, of capitalism and its subordination of desire and of its structuring of life around work, such demands can undermine rather than reinforce capital.

Others have explored self-valorisation in studies of both work and non-work activities. Those studies have borne rich fruit and have provided a wealth of understanding about the diverse experiences of creative struggles that persisted through the crisis, not captured, destroyed or harnessed by capitalist repression or cooptation.

What these concepts of self-valorisation, or of constituent power, or of the creation of new commons do is to draw our attention not only to our ability to limit and constrain capital's domination over us, but also to our abilities and creativity in elaborating alternatives. Just as the concept of the 'refusal of work' helps us to understand how a wide variety of social struggles has undermined capitalist accumulation and repeatedly thrown it into crisis, so too do these concepts help us to understand how our ability to elaborate and defend new ways of being – in our old and new commons – not only against but also beyond capital, is the other side of the crisis.

The power of refusal is our power to carve out times and spaces relatively free from the capitalist imposition of work. The power of self-valorisation is our ability to fill those times and spaces with alternative activities and new forms of sociality – to elaborate our common future in the present. This perspective allows us to recognise and to understand within a political framework the creativity and imagination at work within the so-called 'new social movements' that have always been against the constraints of the capitalist social factory – whether they have articulated their ideas as such or not – and are new primarily in their strength and their imagination.

For example, women's and gay movements have not merely refused the subordination of life to work but have initiated a wide variety of experiments in developing new kinds of gender and family relationships, new kinds of personal and social relations among men and among women. The Green movement has not only attacked the capitalist exploitation of all of nature but has also explored a wide variety of alternative kinds of biocentric relationships between humans and the rest of nature. These movements have overlapped and influenced each other just as they have sought inspiration in various alternative cultural practices, for instance those of Indigenous peoples or those of pre-capitalist European history.

Our political strategy must be to diversify projects of self-valorisation and to avoid being constrained and harnessed within capital by becoming complementary or at least mutually supportive: between us and capital the maximisation of antagonism, among ourselves the elaboration of a politics of difference that minimises or eliminates antagonism. The difficulty is that there is no shortcut, no magic formula, no simple 'unite and fight', not through a particular organisational form, not through an ideology, not even through Marxism (because Marxism provides an antagonistic understanding of capitalist domination but no formula for post-capitalist ways of being). What we want is for our different struggles, against capital and for alternative ways of being, to be complementary and mutually reinforcing. The problem is to find ways of achieving this.

Assuming the accuracy of the kind of analysis I have presented, the struggle against the capitalist reduction of life to work provides one point of commonality to all of us, thus a basis for mutual understanding. Of course, because we are diverse and hierarchically pitted against each other, the imposition of work is experienced differently by different groups of workers so there is nothing simple about organising around the refusal of work. The history of our struggles has made this quite clear.

But it has also made clear that, despite all the differences, people have been able to link up their struggles and make collective gains. Recognising the variation in the ways work is imposed, and the consequent variation in the forms of refusal throughout society, is also useful to be able to recognise the parallels among various kinds of struggles in the present.

When we turn from the struggle against capital to the struggle for a diversity of projects of self-valorisation we have a more difficult problem: how to develop a politics of difference without antagonism. Capital with its essence in command, authority and domination can

only conceive of organisation from the top down, by some kind of 'leadership', and can see only chaos in any other kind of order. We, on the other hand, need to be able to perceive and appreciate a variety of kinds of organisations while always evaluating their appropriateness critically. Much of the best of the 'bottom up' history developed over the last 60 years has involved the discovery and making visible of such organisation in popular movements.

SELF-ORGANISATION

Internal organisation by any self-defined group of people in struggle is *self-organisation*. At the same time, because of diversity, any 'internal' organisation, however managed, must also involve the collective organisation of relationships with other groups, in effect the organisation of the *circulation of struggle*. The question, 'How can we build our own power to refuse work or to self-valorise in our own way?' becomes, 'How can we link up with others so that our efforts do not remain isolated but are mutually reinforcing?' All kinds of internally rigid formulae have survived within small groups, but the story of much of the Left has been that such groups have, in part by their own rigidity, and often by their proselytising, cut themselves off and remained isolated from each other. As a result they have stagnated and remained irrelevant to larger social movements where more flexible and adapted forms of organisation have facilitated the circulation of struggle among diverse groups.

All this is true at every level. Everywhere that organisation fails to achieve the circulation of struggle, it fails, whether in a tiny groupercule, in a single city or region or nation. The strength of relatively small groups, such as the Palestinians, the black freedom movements in southern Africa, or the Zapatistas in southern Mexico, has always been largely due to their ability to build networks of alliance to circulate their struggles beyond their specific locales to other groups in other parts of the world. This, of course, is precisely why in every case capital's strategy has been to isolate them, with trade, financial boycotts or travel restrictions so that they could be destroyed. We cannot overemphasise the importance of this experience and must draw the necessary lesson: only through the ever wider circulation of struggle can we hope to achieve the power necessary to destroy the manifold sinews of capitalist domination and to replace them with new social relationships more to our liking.

Today, when the class confrontation is global, our circulation of our own struggles must be organised throughout the world,

through every linkage possible. If we understand what is required, we have only to find the means. It is a process that is already under way; it always is. The political problems are: first, the assessment of what is working and what is not, which forms of organisation are facilitating the circulation of struggle and which are hindering it; and, second, building those that are working and abandoning or changing those that are not.

Kropotkin sought to understand the desires and self-activity of people and to articulate them in ways that contributed to both their circulation and their empowerment. In the midst of crisis, let us seek out and support, as he did, the sources of popular innovation and strength while at the same time identifying and combating all obstacles to their development.

Box 3.1 E. P. Thompson on Time and Money

Those who are employed experience a distinction between their employer's time and their 'own' time. And the employer must *use* the time of his labour, and see it is not wasted: not the task but the value of time, when reduced to money is dominant. Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent.

The first generation of factory workers were taught by their masters the importance of time; the second generation formed their short-time committees in the ten-hour movement; the third generation struck for overtime or time-and-a-half. They had accepted the categories of their employers and learned to fight back within them. They had learned their lesson, that time is money, only too well.

Source: E. P. Thompson, 'Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism', *Past And Present*, 38, 1967, pp. 57-97, esp. pp. 61, 86.

Box 3.2 Peter Kropotkin on 'Mutual Aid' or Cooperation

For thousands of years in succession, to grow one's food was the burden, almost the curse, of mankind. But it need be so no more. If you make yourselves the soil, and partly the temperature and



the moisture which each crop requires, you will see that to grow the yearly food of a family, under rational conditions of culture, requires so little labour that it might almost be done as a mere change from other pursuits. If you return to the soil, and co-operate with your neighbours instead of erecting high walls to conceal yourself from their looks; if you utilise what experiment has already taught us, and call to your aid science and technical invention, which never fail to answer to the call – look only at what they have done for warfare – you will be astounded at the facility with which you can bring a rich and varied food out of the soil...

... Have the factory and workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens, and work in them. Not those large establishments, of course... but the countless variety of workshops and factories which are required to satisfy the infinite diversity of tastes among civilised men.

Source: Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974 [1899], pp. 196–7.

NOTES

All italics in quotes are preserved from the originals.

1. This chapter includes revised and updated versions of some passages from previously published work: Harry Cleaver, 'Close the IMF, abolish debt and end development: a class analysis of the international debt crisis', *Capital & Class*, No. 39, Winter 1989; 'Kropotkin, self-valorisation and the crisis of Marxism' in *Anarchist Studies* Vol. 2, No. 2, 1994; and 'Socialism' in W. Sach (ed.) *The Development Dictionary: Knowledge as Power*, London: Zed Books, 1992, pp. 233–49.
2. Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, London: Routledge, 1944.
3. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, Harmondsworth/London: Penguin Books/New Left Review, 1973 [1857].
4. Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, New York: International Publishers, 1993 [1871].
5. Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 153–8, is one example of several discussions of the various schemes for labour chits, that is, symbols of credit proportional to work hours.
6. Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, New York: Dover, 2006 [1902].
7. Mario Tronti, *Operai e Capitale*, Turin: Einaudi, 1966.
8. Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, New York/London: Autonomedia/Pluto Press, 1991 [1979].

9. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977 [1844].
10. Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
11. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, New York: Penguin Press, 2004; Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, New York: Semiotext(e), 2004; Paolo Virno, *Multitude Between Innovation and Negation*, New York: Semiotext(e), 2008. In *Empire*, pp. 102–3, Hardt and Negri distinguish between ‘people’ and ‘multitude’ thus:

the modern conception of the people is in fact a product of the nation-state, and survives only within its specific ideological context... We should note that the concept of the people is very different from that of the multitude... The multitude is a multiplicity, a plane of singularities, an open set of relations, which is not homogeneous or identical with itself and bears an indistinct, inclusive relation to those outside of it.

12. Karl Marx, Chapter 10 in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* Vol. I, Harmondsworth/London: Penguin Books/New Left Review, 1976 [1867], pp. 340–416.
13. Andre Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, London: Pluto Press, 1982; Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work*, New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1996.

LIFE WITHOUT MONEY

Building Fair and Sustainable Economies

Edited by Anitra Nelson and Frans Timmerman



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