

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE



- ▶ **Down with these Flags!**
- ▶ **The Global Pressure Cooker**
- ▶ **Rojava**
- ▶ **The Economy in the Transition to a Communist Society**

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Public Meetings , Correspondence

Internationalist Perspective holds public meetings as part of its work of stimulating a real debate and discussion around vital questions confronting revolutionaries and the working class. For information on the next meeting, contact IP at one of the addresses below

We invite all readers to send comments on the positions in our publication. The development of a proletarian political milieu on the international level depends on the widest possible discussion and confrontation of ideas.

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Imagine



Anxiety is rising and no wonder. The lack of economic prospects, the social dislocations resulting from capital's penetration of the whole world and its expulsion of ever greater numbers of people from actual production and jobs, the wars over possession it engenders, with their merciless slaughter of civilians, whether through air bombardments or suicide attacks, the many millions of refugees fleeing horror and hopelessness, the climate disturbances... it is indeed a potent cocktail.

People try to make sense of it all. Politicians and other ideologues capture the discussion within their particular spectrum, which varies all the way from Islamophobia and other expressions of racism and warmongering, to empty promises based on the illusion that taking money from the rich and spending it on the poor will solve it all. What they all have in common is that they cannot imagine a world beyond capitalism. All things change, but capitalism, in their minds, is eternal. "It is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism," environmentalist Rob Nixon wrote in a November

2014 *New York Times* Book Review assessment of Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything*.

But the end of capitalism must be imagined if the end of the world, or something close to that, is to be prevented, because all the above mentioned expressions of worsening crisis have their roots in the crisis of capitalism itself. It must be understood that capitalism is not eternal, that the rules it imposes on the world are not "natural" and must be smashed for the sake of our survival, and that they can be smashed, that there is a world possible beyond capitalism.

Of course we don't expect this understanding to come from politicians and other ideologues. We expect it to come from within the very struggle for survival of the proletariat. We expect it to come from small groups and circles within the proletariat who contribute to its struggle by connecting the dots, by showing the way out of the trap that we're swimming in.

That is our aim too. In this issue of *IP* we publish articles that connect the dots and explore the way

out. The first text is a statement *IP* published after the terrorist attacks in Paris last November. Since then, the asymmetrical global war has continued and similar attacks have taken place, in Brussels, Lahore and other places. The statement unfortunately fits those horrible events as well. It explains the strategic (capitalist) aims of the attacks and denounces the abuse of the victims for the purpose of whipping up nationalism and war-support, and the use of fear to expand repressive power.

The second article is a global overview of the turmoil in the world at this point in time, the spring of 2016. It is followed by a closer look at Rojava, a proto-state in northern Syria, which, while being involved in inter-imperialist war, supposedly also is creating a post-capitalist society. The article criticizes the illusion that on nationalist soil, a revolutionary alternative can grow.

Imagining the end of capitalism, what does that mean? What kills it, what sneaks it back in? That is a question examined in the last text, written some years ago by RV, a member of the pro-revolutionary “Cercle” of Paris. Its starting point is a critique of the idea that replacing money by labor vouchers would end capitalism.

The longest text in this issue is also the reason why it appears with quite a bit of delay. We took our time to write and discuss it collectively. It is our attempt to formulate how all the misery and

promise of our times, the despair and the hope, are connected. How we make sense of it all. The world as we see it, anno 2016. We hope that it will encourage other pro-revolutionaries to think about this, to discuss this text and criticize and comment. On the Libcom-list the text provoked some discussions, on which we will report on our website.

This text has a particular importance for IP’s life as a revolutionary political group. In *IP 60* we informed our readers of difficulties we had had over the recent past, especially disagreements that emerged over the first part of ‘IP and the Tradition of the Communist Left’ published in *IP 57*. We consider that the text published here reflects where we stand as a group, at this time. It’s not the last word on anything but it responds to the need for a coherent understanding of the social world in its totality, the need to understand how it all fits together. In *IP 60* we said that: “We believe Internationalist Perspective has made a worthwhile contribution to the development of Marxist theory and has endeavored to intervene in social struggles to the degree we could. All of us in Internationalist Perspective wish to continue with this activity.” We think that this reference text shows that ongoing commitment.

Read and spread this issue and send us your comments.

IP

Internationalist Perspective on-line

- Internationalist Perspective is in the process of launching a new version of our web site. The new version will be more dynamic than the existing one and will allow readers to be more directly involved in our discussions.
- The IP web site is available in English and French, and contains all the articles from the print edition, as well as articles and discussions which do not appear in the regular edition of *IP*. We also publish a blog.
- To visit our web site, go to <http://internationalist-perspective.org>
- To visit our blog go to <http://internationalist-perspective.org/blog>

We do not see either of these sites as solely “our” property, but instead as places where discussions and exchanges of ideas can be held. We encourage readers to read, write and get involved.

Down With These Flags!



Ilons enfants de la patrie, le jour de gloire est arrivé...”

(“Let’s go, children of the fatherland, the day of glory has arrived...”

–the opening of the ‘Marseillaise, the French national anthem)

The following text is a statement IP put out after the terrorist attacks in Paris last november. It was widely shared on social media and internet lists. We received some criticism, in particular of the claim that ISIS is a capitalist enterprise and “not a religious movement”. Indeed, it would be more correct to state that it is both. Both aspects coexist within ISIS and use each other. As a capitalist state ISIS uses religious fervor for the purpose of capital accumulation, and as a religious movement, ISIS uses the instruments of the state to advance its fanatical religious goals. Those two aspects fit together smoothly, united by the common goal of conquest, although lately tensions have been reported between factions focused on consolidating ISIS’s management of its territory and factions that want to expand the global ‘Jihad’, regardless the consequences. It remains to be seen how that plays out. The role that religion plays today in capturing the rage of some of the most marginalized proletarians is not something that we have foreseen. It begs for a deeper analysis.

The Marseillaise is popular again. The bloodthirsty song rises again from thousands of throats on French squares, before sport events and concerts, in the Sorbonne and in the parliament: “Amour sacré de la patrie, conduis, soutiens nos bras vengeurs!” (“Sacred love of the fatherland, lead, support our vengeful arms!”) On Facebook a campaign was started to exhort users all over the world to change their profile in the colors of the French national flag.

- Do not sing the Marseillaise.

- Do not change your FB profile into the colors of the French national flag.
- Do not fall in the trap of the war-mongering media.

The terrorist attacks in Paris were horrific and repulsive. But nationalism is not the answer; it spreads the poison further. It may be true that most people who now sing the Marseillaise, or change their FB-profile into the French colors, only want to express their solidarity with the

victims. But at a moment like this, it is important to know what the symbols, around which we are asked to close ranks, represent. Under the French tricolor, millions were sent to their death, in wars for worse than nothing. Under this banner, atrocities were committed (in Algeria and elsewhere) that were even worse than those of ISIS, while singing the Marseillaise: “Qu’un sang impur abreuve nos sillons!” (“May their impure blood water our furrows!”)

We don’t want to single out France: other national flags and anthems are equally blood-drenched. ISIS itself is not a religious movement; it simply uses religion as a flag and anthem to recruit cannon-fodder for its real goal: to control territory, to gain power, to amass capital. It seizes opportunities arising in the context of war and economic crisis in the Middle East to establish its own state. A state at war, and in war, as the history of France, the US, Germany and just about any other country illustrates: all is permitted.

What did ISIS have to gain from the attacks in Paris? Continuous recruitment is essential for the so-called Islamic state, it needs it to wage war and to control its territory. The attacks favor its recruitment in two ways: first, as a demonstration of power, which increases its appeal for young people who feel angry and powerless. Secondly, the attacks fan the hatred of Muslims and thus the ill treatment of Muslims, pushing more of them into the tentacles of ISIS. Furthermore, ISIS needs to stop the exodus of refugees out of Syria. It cannot permit the emptying of the territory it controls or wants to conquer. Contrary to what’s often claimed, it does not get its main income from oil-exports or from Saudi subsidies but from the exploitation, in various ways, of the population in the areas it controls. So those who use the attacks to fan hatred for Islam and to keep the refugees out, do exactly what ISIS hoped they would do.

The problem is not Islam. The global system is in crisis and this crisis creates situations in which waging war becomes very profitable. The warring parties feed on each other. The civilian casualties of drones and missiles feed the Islamist propaganda; the Islamist atrocities feed the belligerent, nationalist, anti-other ideologies in the West which prepare the way for more war.

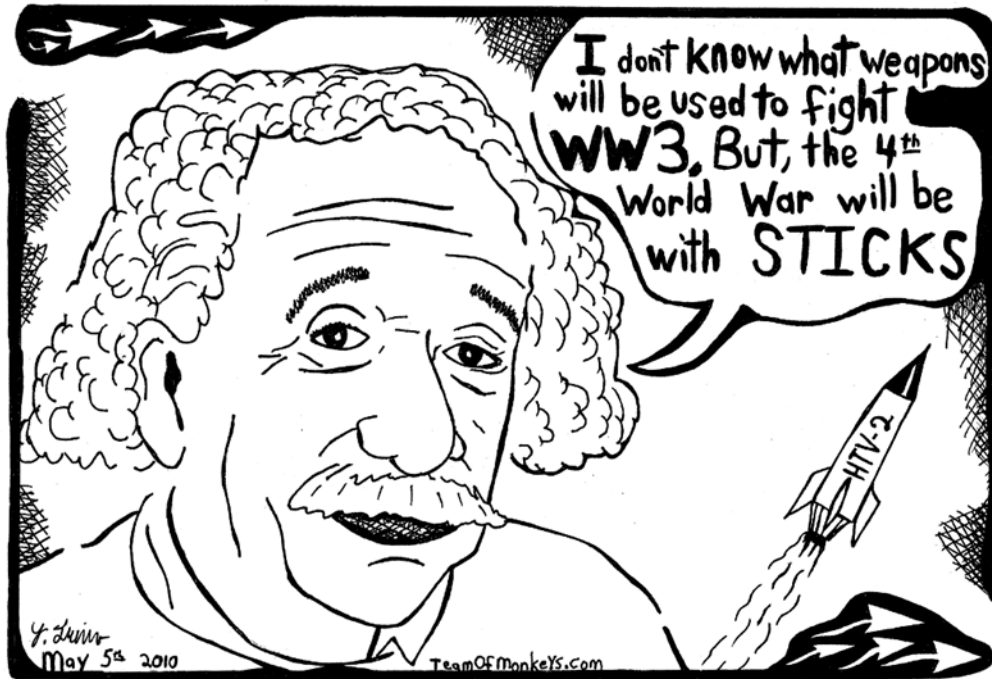
The first thing president Hollande did after the attacks was to send planes to bombard Raqqa, a large city that is said to be the capital of the IS. One wonders: had these planes “clean” military targets for what became the largest bombardment of Raqqa so far? If so, why weren’t they hit before? And if they were not, how many civilians were killed in Raqqa? Will the media tell us? Will there be a campaign on Facebook to put the flag of ISIS on our profile, in solidarity with the innocent victims that fell on its territory? Or will the mangled corpses only be seen on the Islamist social media?

Revenge. Reprisal. Retaliation: The deeper the crisis becomes, the more we risk to see of it. The wars, the terrorist attacks, the massive unemployment and uncertainty, the ecological catastrophes, the swelling stream of refugees, all show that the systemic, global crisis of capitalism brings with it ever more social disruption, violence and destruction. The real problem is in society’s foundations and as long as they remain intact –as long as capitalism survives- the spiral will only widen.

Changing the foundations, changing the purpose and means of human relations, ending capitalism, can only come as a result of massive collective struggle, which does not exist today. Nobody knows what the future will bring. But we do know it’s not written yet. What we do or don’t matters. It matters that we don’t passively accept the logic of capital. It matters that we refuse to sing the national anthem together with those who exploit and oppress us. It matters that we stand in solidarity with the victims of wars and terrorist attacks, whether they are French or Turk, Arab or Jew, black or white, without embracing any of the war-making parties. It matters that we raise our voices against the calls to close borders, erect walls, keep out refugees, and engage in more war. It matters that we say no! to more control, more police violence, more austerity in the name of national security. It matters that we refuse to help dig our own graves. It matters that we demonstrate that none of the problems facing society can be solved within capitalism. It matters that we speak, in the rivulets of revolt, of the power of the stream they could become.

Internationalist Perspective

The Global Pressure Cooker



In Pontecorvo's film *Queimada*, set in the 1830s, the agent provocateur, Sir William Walker, points out that a decade can show the contradictions of a century. Fast forward almost 200 years. It only took a few days into 2016, the strains of *Auld Lang Syne* having barely faded away, to highlight the contradictions of the whole capitalist system today. Once a decade was needed, now only a few days; the acceleration of forces and events is palpable. Indeed, although the various aspects of life under capitalism have always been linked - and those always highlighted in times of crisis - today's expressions of crisis can move from one domain to another to expose a quite astonishing interconnectedness and immediacy as the past few weeks since the start of this year show.

This article aims to put some perspectives on the acceleration of events. One can always point to the underlying crisis of capitalism - its crisis of

value - but this crisis never expresses itself without the decisions and actions of classes and groups, and the vicissitudes of events. It is on these behaviours that this article focusses. In a few pages it is impossible to review the whole world situation so I have selected a few key issues to concentrate on.

* * *

2016 opened with a major fall in the Yuan, forcing the Chinese rulers to find an appropriate response against the backcloth of falling economic expectations. Slackening of economic activity in the world's major workshop has led to overcapacities in world shipping, air freighting, steel production and extraction industries- all of whose output and share prices have fallen substantially. The oil price fell further and it has not yet bottomed given that Iran has now rejoined

the world market. The ever more murderous wars in the Middle East continued apace with the pivotal Saudi/Iranian rivalry and Russian interventions as prominent features. The mass migrations from the region into Europe are straining relationships between EU members; fences are going up between Shengen countries and there is a political and social backlash against immigrants. Meanwhile, all factions of the ruling class defend their right to bomb and murder civilians as and when they wish. The big question is: where is the response of the proletariat?

But before coming to that question, we must look at some aspects of the global crisis since last year. As a starting point, I refer back to the text of October 2014 – ‘Heart of Darkness’ – and its major themes in *Internationalist Perspective 60*. To recap, for some decades we lived in a period of post-imperialist blocs, post-Reagan and Thatcher economics, in which there was an accelerated development of the productive forces, an ever-tightening integration of world capital and its market that promoted both increased interdependence of national capitals and increased competition. This is a particularly profound contradiction today, around which much of the bourgeoisie’s policies are centred. Along with these economic changes, more nation states are asserting themselves aggressively as regional or global imperialist players. Furthermore, for some years strong social movements have collided time and again with broadening imperialist interests – as exemplified in the Arab Spring. A year ago we said that with the deepening economic crisis and the intensification of contradictions against political and social constraints, the world was fissile. It still is, and is getting hotter.

* * *

Financial Exhaustion

Consider how exhausted are the policies of the bourgeoisie in the economically-advanced countries following the financial crisis of 2008. Quantitative Easing – implemented in various ways across the world – was introduced to support the price of capital and increase the money supply through central banks buying

medium and longer-term debt; it has lost almost all its leverage. Although the US stopped the policy in October 2014, the Japanese and European Central Bank have continued with it. Indeed the ECB increased the amount of monthly easing hugely a year ago and again, in desperation, this month by a further third: the current rate of QE is €80 billions/month.

Low interest rates, scarcely above zero for several years, have in places gone negative. The low oil price has brought lower revenues to producing countries while it has not stimulated industrial production in the importing countries. And now the banking system is again showing problems, especially in the Eurozone where banks’ share values have plunged. Deutsche Bank reported heavy losses in January and questions about its ability to pay interest on its contingent liability bonds have highlighted underlying risks. Worse still is the Italian banking system which is a chronic worry to the E.U. And underneath, the Eurozone’s structural problems remain. In the US, the Federal Reserve regrets the view it took in December that the American economy was growing, when it took the opportunity to raise interest rates. In February, Yelland told Congress that “Financial conditions in the US have recently become less supportive of growth,” and that foreign economic developments “pose risks to US economic growth”. The weakening of the economies in the West is reducing demand for Chinese manufacture and, in turn, weakens that country’s growth. And yet the key global policy makers have no alternative plans.

The Oil Price Plummet

The oil price has fallen catastrophically for producing countries – from over \$130/barrel to under \$28 in recent weeks.

Saudi Arabia abandoned its role as global swing producer over a year ago and until recently maintained high production levels, a strategy initially intended to undermine the US fracking and tar sands production. However, this policy – successful regarding the fracking but not against the tar sands - has been draining the Saudi finances savagely. It is difficult to know how long

they can keep it up especially with the costs of their wars, although the oil minister says he is prepared to let it drop to \$20. Iran's output to the world market is only enlarging the glut. The Russian economy likewise suffers – indeed its economy shrank by 6% in 2015 – and the ruling class is imposing savage austerity measures on its enormous population.

There are signs of change. By February Saudi Arabia had made approaches for cooperation to Russia (and other producers both in and outside OPEC) – their opposing military-political activities in Syria notwithstanding. A key meeting is scheduled to take place in Qatar in April where a realignment of oil producers is likely to take place along with agreement on reduced production and a floor for the oil price.

As a symptom of deeper economic weaknesses, the low oil price did not stimulate global production over the past year so its increase will not contribute to an improvement there.

Today's Warfare

Imperialist rivalry has long been a permanent condition of capitalism, with much of the second half of the 20th Century dominated by that between the American and Russian blocs. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union the physiognomy of world imperialism has undergone great change.

Today's sharpening imperialist rivalries are highlighted in many parts of the world, not only between global powers but also between regional imperialisms which have grown in reach and aggressiveness. Characteristics may differ in different theatres – such as in the Middle East, East and South Asia, or in various parts of Africa – in terms of adversaries, material, and strategic and political focus. But together, whatever else they express, these wars constitute a bloody violence against civilian populations; of bourgeois forces against the mass of society.

The Middle East is a vipers' nest of shifting alliances and hostilities. What used to be the focus – the Palestinian question – has been

marginalized; no-one now maintains the fiction of a Palestinian/Israeli peace process. Now other hostilities have moved to centre stage. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia has intensified with both committing air and ground forces and proxies into Syria, Iraq and Yemen which are treated as free-fire zones where civilians are indiscriminately slaughtered along with militias. Turkey's conflicts with Kurdish forces has led to tension with the US which arms them, as has its shooting down of overflying Russian aircraft with Putin. For years the West – the US and other NATO members – has regarded the skies as its own. No longer. In this theatre global powers, regional powers and nearly one hundred militias are all operating in a murderous chaos from which has been generated a massive flood of refugees into Lebanon and Jordan far greater even than that into Europe.

The intricacies of this theatre of conflict change day by day but there are, however, some developments that should be pointed out. In the face of perceived Western, particularly US, hesitation to commit ground forces to confront the Islamic State and to sanction the Assad regime after it crossed a so-called 'red line' by gassing its citizens with chemical weapons, Russia entered the fray with objectives of its own. The combination of Russian cruise missiles and air power and Iranian Revolutionary Guard forces on the ground substantially overwhelmed IS and other anti-Assad forces and provided breathing space to the Syrian regime. The Russian pull-out (whatever the actual level turns out to be) then reduced the danger to them of being sucked into the quagmire. The extension of Russia's use of military force in Crimea and Ukraine to Syria has further complicated the already uneasy relationship between the two strongest military powers. While Putin does not want to have direct military conflict with the West (although his aircraft are not averse to harrying US naval ships near Crimea and South Korea) he has shown himself adept at hobbling Western policies and wrong-footing the US. Putin does not necessarily want to maintain Assad in power, but this action gives Russia an ongoing role and a say in his replacement.



In this regard it is noteworthy that the cynical call for humanitarian aid to the Syrian population and for a cessation in hostilities came from Kerry and Lavrov in a joint US/Russian statement; subsequently, they both called for more progress in the Munich talks which may become again the stage for an illusory 'peace in our time' in this theatre of war. The Russian maneuvers have highlighted to the US the urgent need to define their military posture more coherently.

The Obama Administration has over recent years signalled a desire to re-focus on the Pacific region and to reduce commitments in the Middle East. This has been encouraged in part by the reduced strategic value of Saudi oil to the US and a related and substantial distancing from that erstwhile close ally and also by China's increased belligerence in the Asia-Pacific region. In the South China Sea, China's creation of artificial islands to justify exploitation rights and extended

military reach have substantially increased tensions with Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia. US Navy ships have challenged these activities by sailing within Chinese-claimed waters. Naval exercises in the area will take place this year involving US, Japanese and Indian forces. China, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea have their own tangle of relationships – of rivalries and collaborations - and all are wary of North Korea's possible agendas. Although China may become the world's largest economy, this does not translate in the short term into a military capability able to rival the US but its ability to pressure its neighbours will depend in part on US military commitment and the region is a long way from the American mainland. Yet, China's very bellicosity encourages its rivals into the American aegis.

The ability of the US to re-focus American energies of course will depend on the reduction of

hostilities in the Middle East and that doesn't look likely any time soon. The challenges posed by Russia and China in their different spheres were among the main challenges that US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter identified in early February when presenting his 2017 military budget to Congress. In this presidential election year the American ruling class will be overhauling its strategic priorities and reassessing its view on the commitment to ground forces in foreign wars. The Obama Administration's efforts to pull out from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have not given the US what it wanted and we can expect Obama's successor to have a new mandate for more aggressive pursuit of American interests.

Interwoven with these global and regional imperialist antagonisms is the havoc created by the terrorist franchises which have spread across the globe: kidnappings in West Africa by Boko Haram, terrorist strikes in Europe by Islamic State and al-Qaeda groups, murderous street shoot-outs in Djakarta and Paris, bombings in Ankara and Brussels, Libya in chaos. The Islamic State, Daesh, has long spent its start-up funding from its original Saudi and Qatari backers and is now mainly self-sufficient thanks to selling oil and extorting the population under its control. Training foreign fighters and sending them home is a low-cost means of spreading the impact of the economic, political and social consequences of world imperialism's policies back to China, Russia, Europe and the US where the propaganda of the ruling class tries to decouple their own long-term violence from the current blowback. Once the bourgeoisies of these major states considered their terror could be applied with impunity, now the jihadist terror reaches into their homelands. War has become normal everywhere; war is all around. Rarely do nation states now declare war on each other and march armies to battlefields. Today, war is endemic to everyday life for more and more populations under capitalism.

Just two days after the recent carnage in Brussels a UN war-crimes tribunal convicted Radovan Karadzic of the murder of 8,000 Bosnian Muslims amid wider crimes against humanity during the atrocious Balkan wars in the 1990s and underlined that fact that there is nothing the

Eastern jihadists can teach Christian Europe about barbarism.

Stressed-out Europe

The state of the economy is not the only source of stress in the EU. The most dramatic and gut-wrenching human images of the last year concern the massive migrations of *peoples all over the world* fleeing exploitation, oppression and destruction of their means of existence. Not since 1945 have there been such massive flights from conflict zones. From Syria, Iraq and Lebanon; from Eritrea and Sudan; from Yemen; from West and North Africa; from everywhere they flee, fleeing from war, destitution and torture. They flee from the bombings of the West and Russia, from Islamic State, the Taliban and Boko Haram, from a multitude of armies and militias. Millions have made it no further than countries adjacent to the war zones. But over the recent past a torrent of migrants have aimed for refuge in Europe where directly and indirectly they are intensifying social and political stresses on the EU. En route they have provided the raw material for human trafficking to become an industrial-scale – and murderous - business.

The dominant public mood has swung back and forward between sympathy and hostility for the migrants. Merkel, initially lauded for her openness towards the refugees, has found her political position suddenly become precarious. Not only in Germany but in most other European countries right-wing groups and parties are amplifying and preying off currents of xenophobia. The stresses are considerable as the ruling class spreads the social wage across an increased population; the effects are not only economic but are also expressed in cultural clashes such as in Cologne at the 2015 year-end. This is all grist to the mill of right wing governments such as the Law and Justice Party in Poland and Hungary's Fidesz. (Long concerned about Fidesz, it has only taken a few weeks experience of the new Polish government for the European Commission to consider monitoring the Polish government to assess if its policies pose "systemic threats" to the rule of law.)



The migrations have generated huge problems for the EU rulers and forced them to take extraordinary and near-panicked responses. After 20 years of free movement in the Shengen Area the fences are going up again; country after country is adding controls to handle the flows of people and deal with their settlement. And after holding up Turkey's application for accession to the EU for decades, in only a few days the EU concocted a deal promising to accelerate accession talks, open the Shengen area to Turkish citizens, take up to 72,000 refugees from Turkish camps, and give €6 billion cash in return for Turkey taking back from Greece those migrants who fail to get asylum. Clearly, this is not 'business as usual'.

Furthermore, the migrations have provided cover for jihadists to return to Europe from the war zones. The carnage in Paris and Brussels will generate more tension around the migrations. It

will surely be used in the UK where the Brexit referendum is scheduled for June where parties make poisonous cocktails of issues: refugees and terrorists, economic migrancy and so-called benefit tourism, racism and separatism. Separatist tendencies in the UK are strengthening, although it's not clear just how much. Attention over the past couple of years concentrated on a possible Scottish exit from the UK, but there are indications of stronger support for Brexit. It's not just the right wing of the Conservative Party but also the UK Independence Party and parts of the Labour Party (which historically has blown hot and cold on Europe) that want to leave the EU. Since the referendum will be a popular vote, parliamentary party results do not give an indicator. European governments are finally waking up to the fact that a British exit is a real possibility.

Coupling the Eurozone economic problems, the weaknesses of the Mediterranean countries and various separatist tendencies such as in the UK, Spain and Greece to the migration issue it is clear that Europe is under great stress at all levels. Some bourgeois commentators forecast the end of the EU; this is premature although the ruling class is clearly feeling instability grow in the face of all these events.

The Politics of Alienation

One striking expression of alienation today is in the circus that is the current American presidential primaries season.

Early expectations for the presidential election were a clash between the Bush and Clinton dynasties representing the Republican and Democratic Parties. Having got majorities in the Senate and the House, the Republican Party thought that with the right candidate they could complete the triad with the Presidency too and the funds gathered indicated that Jeb Bush had a good chance for the nomination. In the Democratic camp, Clinton looked to have the most suitable credentials: a Senator, Secretary of State and – a woman. The trend towards banality in previous campaigns looked set to continue. However, the major surprise has been the performances of Trump and Sanders: on the Republican side a billionaire who doesn't trust the politicians he used to buy, wants Mexico to pay for a wall to be built along the border and to ban Muslims entering the US; and from the Democrats an elderly senator who describes himself as a democratic socialist (a word that would have previously anathematized any politician using it) and who offers free education and a hike to the minimum wage. Both these candidates have reached outside the party structures directly to a population that has suffered years of austerity and increasing precariousness in livelihood and is more and more turned off by jaded political institutions and processes which are imposed by force, money and lies. Their populist rhetoric and the strength of its resonance in their respective constituencies has confounded both party establishments, as it

did in last year's election of Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party in England.

There is an enormous well of anxiety, anger and cynicism in the population and the political castes in many Western countries are tapping into it for their own benefit. The non-stop global media coverage showing the brutality of IS, the carnage in the Middle East, the flood of refugees into Europe, the terrorist attacks are then used by politicians and the media to heighten anxiety and disorientation, sustaining their mystifications. In the absence of struggle the cycle continues. Perversely, it appears that the worse capitalism gets the more ideological weapons the bourgeoisie finds to use against the population.

Social and Class Struggles

In the face of worsening conditions, social struggles are triggered and respond to different local conditions; there is no longer a clearly identifiable general tendency expressed across the world as there was in the enormous response to the consequences of the global financial crisis of 2008. The social movements following that crisis had many faces: the Arab Spring, Greek demonstrations, the *indignados* movements in Spain and Portugal, the Occupy movement which had nearly 1,000 demonstrations in nearly 100 countries (over 600 in the US), as well as many specific reactions to issues such as cuts in education support. The response of the various bourgeoisies ranged from temporarily giving concessions to brutal suppression. The period did show the importance of a global phenomenon to provide focus for resistance to the austerity the ruling class almost universally imposed.

Struggles have become more heterogeneous, more disparate. In the US, 'Black Lives Matter' has grown in reaction to long-term police brutality. In India, the Dalits maintain an ongoing campaign for more civil rights. Communal strife, a mainstay of the Indian ruling class, has increased and the level of class struggle has diminished considerably over the past several years.

In contrast, social and class struggles have increased hugely in China. It's difficult to assess the numbers of riots that take place as the various official statistics are likely to have been doctored. Nonetheless the numbers of protest events against state bureaucrats, corruption and forcible removal of people to make way for new projects are certainly to be measured in the tens of thousands annually. The importance of dealing with social unrest is reflected in the fact that the Chinese budget for spending on internal security exceeds its military expenditure.

And more ominously for the ruling class, the struggles of Chinese workers on their own class terrain have been increasing over the past several years, doubling between 2014 and 2015. To this must be factored in shutdowns and contractions in various parts of the Chinese economy. Thousands of small coal mines are being closed in an accelerated programme which will displace one million workers (added to the nearly 900,000 miners that have been laid off since 2013). Steel plants are being closed in the face of a world steel glut; already, dumping on the world market in past months has led to the eradication of the UK steel industry. Shipyards will be idle because of shipping overcapacity. The ruling class is bracing itself for more reaction from the workers.

The Lunar New Year eruption in Hong Kong over the police mistreatment of the fish ball street-sellers highlights the underlying social tension. Massive confrontations with the state can appear to come out of nowhere. This is at a time when a global economic downturn is expected and the

economic issues are presenting themselves starkly in shutdowns and unemployment for huge numbers of workers even provoking strikes and demonstrations while the ceremonial National People's Congress was in session in Beijing.

The global dispersion of the collective worker can make it difficult for proletarians to see in class terms what capitalism is doing to them, so the experience of the Chinese workers will help to highlight the full extent of capitalist exploitation and – hopefully – emphasize the power of collective action. In a world so full of violence and mayhem serving only the interests of the bourgeoisie, the potential for working class struggle in China is welcome but it must not be viewed with any triumphalism.

* * *

Clearly the immiseration across the planet is by itself insufficient to provoke revolutionary action. Of the consciousness necessary to accompany class action we have seen only hints. But the future convergence of several factors – concerning economic hardship, the enhanced threat of state violence and the willingness of workers to act collectively in their class defence – may well provide opportunity to start to breach our containment within capitalist social relations.

Marlowe

March 25, 2016

Rojava in the Vortex of Inter-Imperialist Antagonisms



The “People’s” army in Rojava

Over the past several years Rojava or Western Kurdistan, legally a part of Syria, has been seen by many anarchists, libertarians, and even Marxists as the locus of a social revolution, one that demands solidarity on the part of revolutionaries, all the more so as it has been the object of brutal military assaults, first from Daesh (the Islamic State), and now from Erdogan’s Turkey. Inasmuch as the Middle-East today is literally on fire, the scene of vicious ethnic and religious cleansing, and bloody battles between rival imperialist states and armies, it is important to determine whether we are seeing a mortal threat to capital, an anti-capitalist commune OR an *inter-imperialist* bloodbath in which the population has been mobilized to serve the interests of *capitalism*.

For the past several years, as Syria has collapsed into civil war fueled by the intervention of imperialist states (Iran, Turkey, Russia and the US), Rojava has been under the control of the PYD and its fighters (the YPG), the Syrian offshoot of the PKK (The Kurdistan Workers Party [sic.]), led by Abdullah Öcalan. Originally a Marxist-Leninist, now in Turkish incarceration, Öcalan has had a prison conversion, and under the influence of the writings of the American libertarian, Murray Bookchin, has reinvented himself as a partisan of “communalism” and “Democratic Confederalism.” Suffice it to say that whether paying obeisance to Chairman Mao or to “libertarian municipalism” Öcalan, and Öcalan alone (his photograph is on virtually every “public” space in Rojava) rules; his word is *law*,

and in Rojava, as secretly in much of the Kurdish regions of Turkey itself (at least by night), the Kurdish Workers Party rules. In Rojava the PYD has built a one-party state. The nature of the “democracy” to which the partisans of the PYD, both in the West and in Rojava, point, is no different – slogans aside – from that of the “people’s democracies” in the Stalinist bloc during the cold war. Indeed even the *feminism* to which its partisans also point, with its women “warriors,” hair flowing in the wind, gun in hand, bears an uncanny resemblance to those photos of *La Pasionaria* on the front page of the Stalinist press in 1936, which Russian imperialism used so well to mobilize public support. The fact that Rojava itself has been brutally attacked by both IS and by The Turkish AK regime of Erdogan, cannot be the basis for any kind of revolutionary *defencism*, as so many in the libertarian “world” are calling for. The class line in an inter-imperialist war is not based on which side fired the first shot; on whose troops crossed the border first or started the war, or even the particular brutality of one or the other of the combatant armies. On such a basis, revolutionaries will always have to choose one capitalist state, one imperialist bloc, or the other, thereby guaranteeing the victory and consolidation of capitalism; and thereby precluding any possibility of either resistance to its power, or to articulating a political position that might become a basis for actual resistance to imperialism on both sides of the front line.

Is the Kurdish nationalism of the PKK/PYD, different from the Kurdish nationalism of Iraqi Kurdistan and Masoud Barzani? Certainly the *ideology* is different. In Iraqi Kurdistan capitalism has become a mantra in what is now a *de facto* American protectorate, and military base, where it is politically difficult to distinguish between the Kurdish *Peschmerga*, armed and equipped by the US, and the American special ops and troops based in Erbil. Yet apart from the Western “tourists” who in the recent past came to Rojava to see a “libertarian commune” in practice, Rojava too is full of CIA agents and American special ops. Indeed, when IS threatened to capture the Kurdish stronghold of Kobane, it was American air power that saved the town for the PYD. Neither in its Kurdish nationalism nor in its mobilization for inter-imperialist war at the side

of the US can one make a distinction in class nature between Rojava and Erbil!

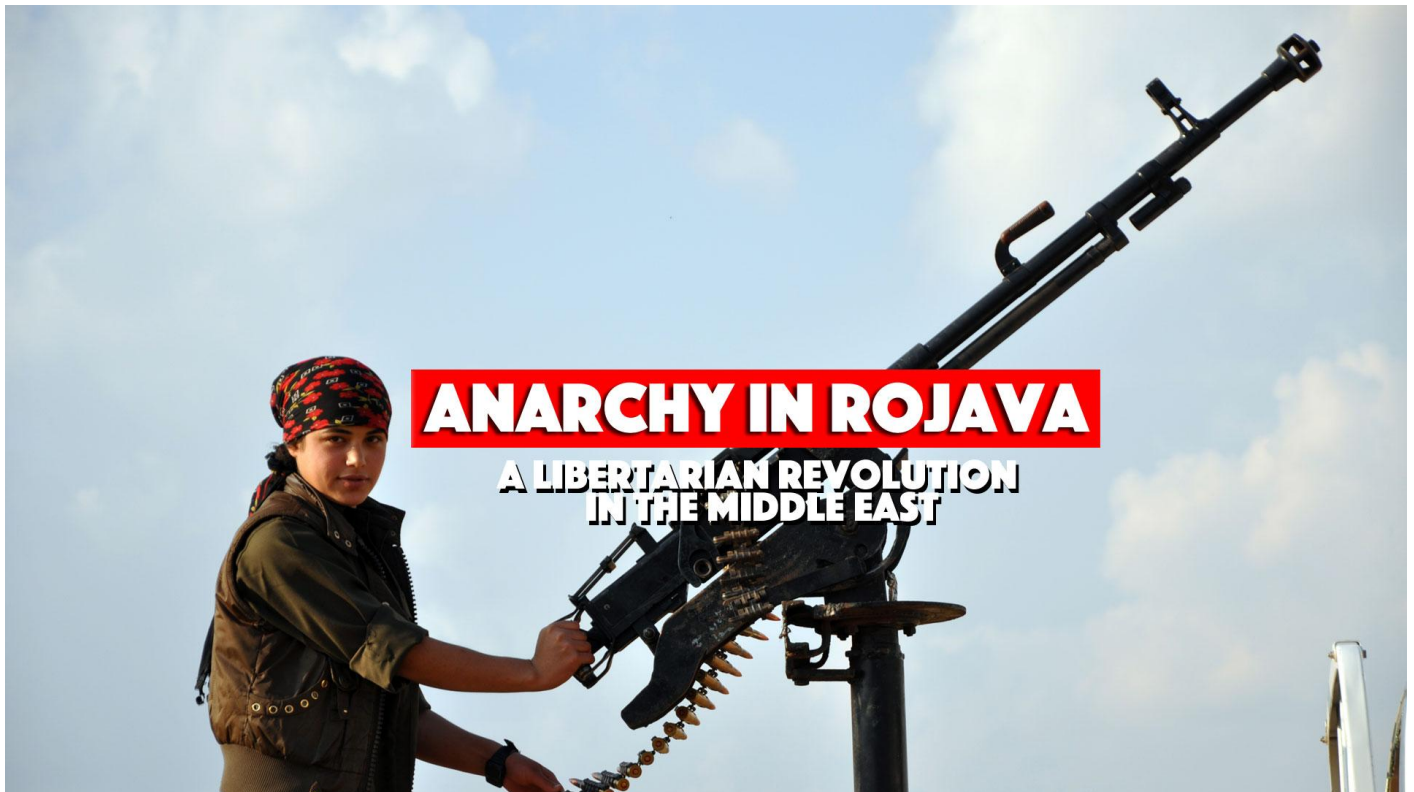
Today, the clash between imperialist states and their local allies has turned the Middle East into a veritable charnel house, in which the acclaim for Rojava can no longer be seen as naïve or politically *innocent*, but rather as a descent into the ideological vortex of imperialism itself, for which excuses are no longer possible. So, let us take a look at the rapidly deepening clash between rival imperialisms in the Middle East, where allies can become enemies on the turn of a dime, starting with the clash between Russian and American imperialism in the region. Putin’s Russia has a foothold in Middle East by way of its naval bases and air fields in Assad’s Syria, dominated by the Alawite minority, whose defense is essential to the retention of Russian influence and power in the region, and to its close relationship with Shiite Iran. The US has now come to see IS as a serious threat to its own power in the region, even at the “cost” of propping up the Shia government in Iraq. Indeed, though it is too early to tell, the possibility exists that the Iran nuclear deal could at some point in the not too distant future begin a process of *détente* with Teheran, particularly if Washington’s traditional Sunni allies (Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Jordan) remain unwilling to take the lead and provide the ground forces to crush IS. The growing disenchantment of America with its Sunni allies, applies to Sunni Turkey, and the Erdogan government too, which sees Assad’s Syrian regime as an enemy to be destroyed, along with the Kurdish nationalism that threatens the very territorial integrity of Turkey in its Eastern provinces, the same Kurdish nationalism that is a lynchpin of American strategy in Iraq and Syria. Into that tangled skein Erdogan has now sent his troops across the border into Rojava to perhaps crush the PYD and YPG there, and at the same time both challenge Syrian claims to sovereignty, as well as Ankara’s traditional enemy Russia, the protector of Assad. And, at the same time Russia and the US are seeking a “ceasefire” in Syria, which it hopes would permit Russia to attack IS, even as Assad, with Russian aid, seems to be reclaiming Aleppo, and now perhaps Idlib too, thereby turning the tide in that protracted civil war through the mass killing of their civilian populations by relentless Russian bombing.

History is replete with dramatic turns in inter-imperialist conflicts, and we just might be on the cusp of one now.

Whatever *turns* there might be, however, one thing is clear: those who insist on seeing Rojava through the lens of social revolution are blinding

themselves to the ongoing inter-imperialist slaughter which quite literally shapes events there on the ground. When you're supporting the same side as the CIA, do you really need Google Maps to tell you that you've crossed the *class line*?

Mac Intosh



Well, not really.

Internationalist Perspective

– The World As We See It:

Reference Points



Illustration by Du Zhen Jun

Introduction

From its start, Internationalist Perspective (IP) has believed in the importance of revolutionary theory, because, in our view, the communist revolution can only be a conscious act of social transformation, not something the working class stumbles into unconsciously, driven automatically by crisis and calamity. But we also believed that revolutionary theory is not a finished product, that it is not a pre-existing program that has to be merely assimilated and applied. Both misconceptions were and are present in the traditional Communist Left, the political current within which our group originated. We still identify with the Communist Left, with its fight against the degeneration of the Second and Third Internationals, with its unwavering defense of revolutionary positions even in the worst of times. However, some came to believe that theory is irrelevant because the working class will simply be compelled by economic conditions to overthrow capitalism, while others claimed that revolutionary theory is essentially finished and merely needs to be absorbed by the class. It was this latter view which in 1985 led to a split between those who would form IP and the organization they were then a part of, the Internationalist Communist Current (ICC). In that year, the ICC adopted the position that “class consciousness” was different from “consciousness of the class”, that Marxist theory embodied the first, and that it would require an ever larger army of militants to spread the first into the second. This dogma was not to be challenged, and those who did were literally shown the door.

So it was in the first place our view of revolutionary theory which distinguished us from the group we separated from. In fact, at first we called ourselves the “External Fraction of the ICC” (EFICC) to indicate that we did not distance ourselves from the platform of the ICC, but from its view of revolutionary theory, and the consequences it drew from it. Indeed, since that theory, for the ICC, was a done deal, its focus was, and is, how to expand as an organization in order to better accomplish the task of spreading it. Discussions took place on the basis of that paramount objective, but there was no patience for those who found the theory wanting, who saw the need to question it, to critique and develop it. The further evolution of the ICC amply illustrates the sad consequences of such a calcified view of theory¹.

In contrast, the first thing we said about our project in the summary of our positions on the back cover of our magazine was that we based ourselves on Marxism, but as “a living theory, one that can go back to its sources, criticize them, and develop hand in hand with the historical social trajectory.” And also: “IP does not aim to bring to the class a finished political program, but rather to participate in the general process of clarification that unfolds within the working class.”

For us, that process of clarification requires the development of theory which can only occur through discussion, confrontation of divergent positions, questioning what has been taken for granted, being open to new ideas, deepening our analysis of the ever-changing political, economic and social conditions. From the start it was clear to us that this was not our task alone and therefore we oriented ourselves to other pro-revolutionary groups and individuals, inviting them to debate, prodding them to abandon sectarian and competitive practices. We emphasized that, for this debate to be fruitful, any form of intimidation must be abhorred, arguments based on authority (of Marx or whomever) don’t count, and of course, violence or the threat thereof is totally unacceptable. Developing theory means deepening our understanding of reality. Therefore, it must be informed by the study of reality, of history as well as current conditions. But it also must be informed by intuition and experience, of daily life and participation in struggles. Theoretical issues are always also *political* issues; theory and political praxis are integrally connected. IP rejects the approach

¹ See, amongst other texts, this brochure of the comrades of the Cercle de Paris, who left the ICC in 2000: <http://cercledeparis.free.fr/indexORIGINAL.html>, and our review of it in *Internationalist Perspective* 38.

of theory as standing outside of politics, as well as the view that separates theoretical work from the praxis of one's own life.

This approach of our theoretical task led us away from our starting point, the ICC platform, whose theoretical flaws became increasingly clear to us. Therefore we abandoned the name External Fraction of the ICC and adopted the name of our publication. In 1994, we published a text called "The World as We See It: Reference Points,"² which summarized our overall analysis, informed by the actual changes in society and the critical theoretical work we had done so far. But that work had not yet gone deep enough to rid ourselves of vestiges of the mechanical, determinist framework of traditional Marxism, and we still had to discover some of the crucial insights of Marx, such as his understanding of commodity fetishism, which, for "traditional Marxism,"³ are merely inconsequential abstract notions. Most of the theoretical work IP has done happened after we wrote the Reference Text of 1994. Besides our own efforts (in studying and developing crisis-theory, in analyzing the restructuring of capital and the re-composition of classes, state-capitalism, the trajectory of capital, the history of class struggle, etc) we were greatly helped by getting to know texts Marx wrote later in life which until quite recently were unpublished, by the development of pro-revolutionary Marxist theory outside the traditional communist left (such as *Wertkritik* and the *Communistateurs*), by research and analysis of non-Marxists, and by the means provided by the internet to debate and communicate.

We think our understanding of reality has deepened. The text we wrote in 1994 is no longer an adequate presentation of "The world as we see it."Therefore we have written a new reference text. All members of IP have contributed to it and we have discussed it thoroughly. Yet we don't see this as a finished text. We are aware that so much work remains to be done, especially in regard to the processes of consciousness, in finding the weak points of reification. But here it is. The world as we see it. Anno 2016

Internationalist Perspective

² http://internationalist-perspective.org/IP/ip-archive/ip_27_reference_points.html

³ Traditional Marxism, often presented by its adherents as "Scientific Socialism," constituted the theoretical bases of those who designated themselves as "Marxists," first in the Social-Democratic parties, then in the Third International and later in the Fourth International, as well as in Stalinism, however different the political positions of these currents have been. Its bases have been a crude philosophical *materialism* as propounded by Engels, the bases for an explanation of all physical and social phenomena, an *economism* in which ideas and political positions are reduced to a direct expression of economic interests, a *teleological* and *deterministic* vision of history, in which communism is seen as the successor to capitalism, the *inevitable* outcome and end of a *necessary* succession of modes of production. Traditional Marxism and the theory of Marx are two different things: The first is used to control and subjugate the working class, the second is an essential instrument for its liberation. It should also be noted, the historical communist left too retained elements of that traditional Marxism in its own theory.

1. Capitalism is Destroying our World

Despite the growing disasters, despite the warnings of its own scientists, capitalism continues to plunder the environment and cause catastrophic climactic change because the need to pursue profit and accumulate value trumps all other concerns.

Despite the evidence that curtailing demand worsens its overcapacity, capitalism cannot act otherwise than to impose austerity, attack wages and especially the social wage (pensions, health care, unemployment benefits, etc) because the source of its profit is exploitation. Forced by its own crisis, capital must seek to intensify exploitation and to reduce costs that don't generate profit, no matter the social consequences.

Despite the presence of social knowledge and means of production that make the eradication of poverty entirely possible, capitalism everyday creates more hunger, more homelessness, more slums, more sickness, insecurity and anxiety, more depression and suicides.

Despite the fact that new information technology has the potential to create free time for all, it is wielded by capitalism for the pursuit of profit, and used to increase the intensity of work for some and to make others superfluous. Capitalism uses information technology to integrate the whole world, but also to expel more and more people from its global assembly line, thereby destroying their conditions of survival. Even in the most developed countries, that is the direction capitalism is inevitably taking. Precarity, the insecurity with respect to even having a job, is becoming a *permanent* and omnipresent feature of proletarian existence in the present epoch. But in poorer countries where the crisis has fostered massive unemployment and war, the trend is most acute. Never were there more migrants -59 million as we write. Desperately, they try to escape, like the passengers on the lower decks of the sinking Titanic rushing upstairs, where an orchestra was playing and nobody was drowning yet.

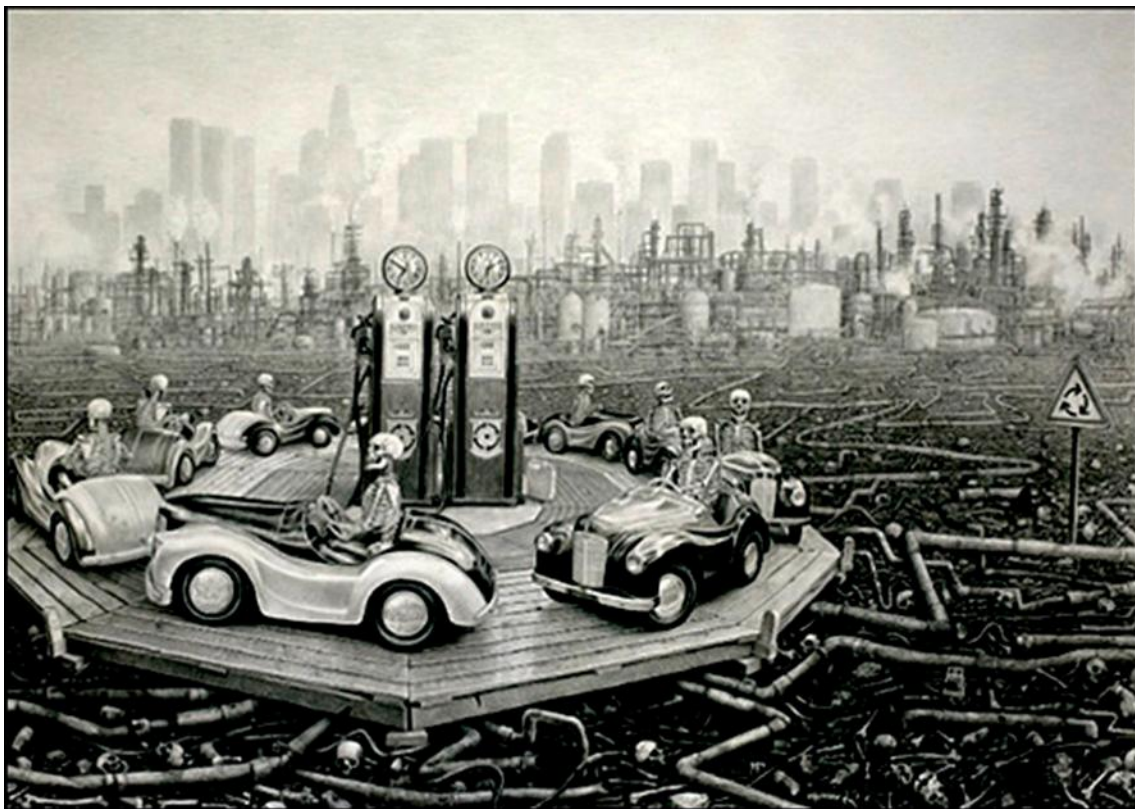
Despite the evidence that the dangers facing humankind require global solutions, capitalism, with its foundation in competition, is incapable of providing them. Instead, its crisis intensifies competition by any means possible. It incites corruption, crime and wars. Religion, ethnicity, nationalism and other ideologies are used to mask the fact that these wars are in essence struggles for possession of capital.

We live in an age of crisis: A crisis of humankind's relation to nature; a crisis of social reproduction of an ever larger part of the world's population; an economic crisis; a financial crisis; a crisis of mental health; an existential crisis and so on.... Their causes seem complex and diverse and indeed they are, but they all take place against a common background of capitalism's conquest of the world. Capitalism has penetrated, developed and unified human society⁴ in its entirety. In doing so, it has created a world in which it no longer fits. As a result, the contradiction between human needs and the needs of capital becomes ever starker. This is what fuels and unifies all these different forms of crisis.

Capitalism leads us to self-destruction. The only way to stop it is to destroy capitalism. The fundamental conflict of our times is between the logic of capitalism and humankind's will to survive, expressed by the resistance of the proletariat. But what does that logic of capital entail? What exactly is capitalism?

⁴ Capitalism has indeed created a unity, but it's a unity in separation. It has replaced communal bonds with social relations in which we're all separate individuals chasing value. Even though the production process has continuously become more social, we remain competing sellers of labor power, separated from the means of production and the products of our labor, to which we relate as individual consumers.

2. What is Capitalism?



Historically, capitalism appears as a specific form of social organization, a system that uniquely maintains itself only on the basis of its relentless economic expansion. Of course, all social forms must reproduce themselves, but only capitalism posits itself in and by its own economic growth. In other social formations, production is at the service of social life. In capitalism, on the contrary, social life is entirely at the service of production and profits are its sole objective. The consequence of this imperative towards expansion has resulted in the monetization of all aspect of life as well as the monetization of all of the resources of the natural environment. In the end, everything will have its price. This quantification of life via the cash-nexus has eroded the most

essential human bonds that form the basis of the human community. At times, this erosion occurs gradually and even imperceptibly; at other times, violently as it did through colonization or the current transformation of the earth into a global factory. The ideologues of capitalism would have us believe that capitalism is the outcome of “man’s natural tendency to truck and barter” to his personal advantage as Adam Smith famously wrote; it is simply the social expression of human nature. But the history of capitalism tells us a very different story. From its inception, to all that we see before us today, capitalism is a story written in blood and filth. This story includes: the forcible privatization of communal land (enclosures), forced labor via laws against vagabondage

(homelessness), colonization, the slave trade, child labor, militarized economic trade zones, forcible opening and closing of markets, and endless wars of economic competition; all of this directly attributable to the expansive needs of capitalism. The ideologues would also have us believe that capitalism is a stable system described as a dynamic equilibrium that continually innovates to improve the lives of the multitude. At times capitalism has the appearance of stability in its heartlands, but, at its expansive edge, capitalism always displays a savagery that exceeds the imagination. As capitalism competes within itself to accelerate the imperative to produce--entering a phase that today we could call "hyper-industrialization"⁵-- it simultaneously leaves behind, even in its heartlands, a colossal waste of human and material resources. Detroit is but one example of these modern wastelands. As it produces spectacular wealth at greater speeds, capitalism produces even faster a degrading and grinding poverty globally that has spawned the largest human migration in modern times.

Given its historic tendency to expand for the sake of expansion--relentlessly devouring our future, given the misery that accompanies its production of wealth and given the depths of the current crisis, how does capitalism maintain itself? In the last instance, it defends itself against all opposition with police and military force, but infinitely more effective is the direct incorporation of the social subjectivity into the productive mechanism of everyday life. It is the monetized subject that reproduces capitalist social relations in even the smallest activity.

In the most basic terms, capitalism is a result of a unique convergence between 1) an abundant source of "free" labor, 2) an accumulation of capital in its money form and 3) the appearance of a state apparatus capable of regulating a new productive/distributive regime. "Free" labor in this case means *proletarianized* labor or a mass of workers who possess no means of their own to autonomously reproduce their lives and are thus compelled to sell their labor-power as a unit of

time for a wage offered by a capitalist. Laborers are also "free" in the sense that they can choose to sell their labor power to the highest bidder or not sell it at all; quite unlike pre-capitalist systems where labor was a political, social or even spiritual obligation. In pre-capitalist forms of society, the surplus wealth created by labor was directly and visibly expropriated from the worker/peasant. Capitalism, however, posited a new form of expropriation by burying it deep within the production process itself rather than in the sphere of circulation where it is seen by all. This new economic relationship absolved the capitalist of all social, political and spiritual obligations to society. In fact, the exchange between the worker and capitalist ---labor-time for a wage---appears to be an equal exchange entered into without social or political coercion. Workers agree that their labor-time is worth the wages offered and thus all reciprocal obligations are fully met at the end of the workday. This, at least, is the appearance.

To mediate this new relationship however, capitalism also required that wealth be expressed and circulated in the form of money. It is through the money form that expropriation is hidden. The essential characteristic of money is that it makes possible the appearance of a universal form of value through its continual exchange, not by equating one commodity to another but by equating all commodities to each mediated by monetary exchange. Money thus becomes the expression of universal value. But of what is value the expression? Capitalism has posited value not in the commodity itself as a particular object but rather as the measure of the average labor-time required to produce the object. In this way, capital renders all existing commodities commensurable on the basis of labor and can thus claim that commodities exchange at their real value, i.e. the total cost of production. Value itself stalks about in a continual state of transformation: money becomes machinery, raw materials and labor; raw materials, machinery and labor become commodities; commodities become money again and the cycle continues ad infinitum in an ever widening spiral. The whole of society, now measured in value, becomes a vanishing appearance. *Profits and capital accumulation are derived from an unpaid portion of the laboring day, the hidden source of expropriation.* (See Marx, *Capital* vol.1)

⁵ Hyper-industrialization is the tendency to transform all human activity into value-production, characterized by interdependent global markets and the continual acceleration of the total circuit of capital.

Capitalism appears then as a vast web of exchanges where all goods circulate via the infinite flow of money. On the surface, money appears to be the ultimate guarantor of freedom and equality. In the realm of circulation, the point at which goods are distributed, everyone is equal, without special privilege, governed by a total social symmetry. The dollar of the housemaid has the same value as the dollar in the pocket of the oil baron. Each is equally free to dispose of that dollar accordingly. Indeed, this is ultimately the meaning of freedom and equality within the context of capitalism and the source of the extraordinary power capital has over its subjects. However, in the realm of production there exists an asymmetrical relationship of power between buyer and seller, an *un*-freedom that does not directly appear in the exchange. The fact that labor is exchanged for money means essentially that inequality and coercion hide behind the facade of equality and free exchange. And this is indeed the historic role of the state in capitalism, to guarantee the permanent asymmetry between labor and capital, to guarantee that labor is always the subject of compulsion, i.e., need. This is the history of the entire legal and political system and the “bloody legislation” imposed on society by the capitalist state. The state is not now and never has been a vehicle for human liberation; its most essential function, beyond its military requisite, is to maintain the stability of the currency, to guarantee the sanctity of the exchange contract

and to ensure the adequate supply of cheap labor. That is to say that the state, in all its modern forms, is the political expression of capitalism. Any definition of capitalism that does not incorporate the state as a necessary element of its definition will never grasp the mode of domination created by capitalism.

The universe proposed by capital is a total universe with the power to ingest, absorb, and transform everything that is fed into it. The drive to accumulate reduces everything to a single negotiable currency. All existence is conceived as a set of exchanges. Every being is commensurable with every other in the capitalist field of vision. That which cannot be reduced as such is at best rendered impotent and irrelevant, at worst violently repressed. In the end, capitalism is not about the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. Whether 1%, 10% or 50%, the redistribution of wealth does not challenge the essence of capitalism, an essence that is buried in the production process, founded on the *proletarianization* of labor, with a relentless imperative to expand without regard for the human cost.

3. The Historical Trajectory of Capitalism

Human history is not *teleological*; it has no inherent goal towards which it inexorably moves. Yet a specific social formation or mode of production may possess a directional *logic*, historical tendencies and contradictions that shape and characterize its very development. And the historical trajectory of *capitalism* is characterized by such a directional logic.

The specific confluence of socio-economic processes that led to the development of industrial capitalism in England in the 17th and 18th centuries

was predicated on the separation of the landed laborer from the means of production and subsistence, a process that entailed the legal freedom of the direct producer, a result of often violent class struggles, which constituted the bases for the appropriation of surplus labor by *economic* and non-coercive legal means; by *market* forces and the development of *waged*-labor, and the formation of a *proletarian* class. Those developments set in motion over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries a mass movement to the new centers of industry inside England that

led to the rapid development of an industrial proletariat. Such processes were also well underway in other parts of Europe such as in the Low Countries and northern Italy. Once it came into being in one place, industrial capitalism almost immediately affected all countries reached by trade relations set by the earlier mercantilism. Thus, all capitals that appeared after England developed in a world in which industrial capitalism already existed; consequently the context for capitalism's developmental logic was from a very early stage – *global* developments. Industrial capitalism was the product of a politico-social historical matrix which over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries imposed its social and production relations on the whole world, first Western Europe, then North America, and then the rest of the world.

Capitalism is propelled by the quest for an infinite accumulation of *value*, a literal compulsion, on the pain of “death” of each capital entity – individual capitalist, corporation, monopoly or state – to extract ever-more surplus-value from living labor. Capital, then, is valorizing value, a never-ending process, which in what Marx termed its phase of *formal domination* (or *formal subsumption*) of labor exploits living labor on the bases of existing techniques of production and technologies and extracts from the worker “absolute surplus-value,” the increase of which is brought about by the prolongation of the working day. What Marx termed the *real domination* of labor, by contrast, extracts ever-more surplus-value from the proletariat by constantly revolutionizing the technical processes of labor through the introduction of new and more efficient technologies, in short through the development of the productive forces. More surplus-value is extracted, not by making workers work longer (absolute surplus-value) but by intensifying the labor process and cheapening the products which workers buy with their wages, so that the value of labor power diminishes in relation to the value which it creates, which yields, for the buyer of that labor power, “*relative surplus-value*.” The real domination of capital, now established on a global scale, is increasingly predicated on the extraction of relative surplus-value.

The transition from formal to real domination was not the result of a singular “industrial revolution” but a “constantly repeated revolution in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers, and in the relation between workers and capitalists”⁶ of which the present information-technology driven post-Fordist global economy is the latest manifestation.

The benefit of real domination for capitalism as a whole, apart from the fact that its superior productivity allowed it to conquer and plunder the world, is the relative surplus value resulting from the continuous intensification of the work process and the constant lowering of the value of labor power. The less labor time is needed to produce the commodities to reproduce the working class, the more labor time goes to the capitalists. But that is not the main incentive. Most capitalists can't directly lower the value of the labor power they employ unless their own factories produce the commodities their workers consume.

The incentive is surplus-profit (extra surplus-value). Commodities are exchanged on the base of their social value. That is, the (past and living) labor time that is consumed in their production under average social conditions. New technology which reduces that labor time below average, which lowers the individual value of a commodity under its social value which determines its price, yields surplus-profit for the capitalist. New technology and know-how can be even more profitable for the capitalist when it leads to the creation of new products over which the owner enjoys a temporary monopoly, so that its price is only limited by what the market is willing to bear. In periods of accelerated technological innovation, such as today, the opportunities for such surplus profits are considerable. The crisis intensifies the hunt for them as it spurs on advanced capitals to seek to escape from the general decline of profitability. But surplus profits are obtained on the market at the expense of competitors. They therefore don't necessarily indicate anything about the profitability of capital as a whole.

Whatever the level of productivity established at a given time, new technologies can make it possible

⁶ Marx, “Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 1035 (Penguin edition)

to increase surplus labor *time* even more, so that capital must always seek the further development of the productive forces. That's why history has disproven the theories of capitalism's decadence that are based on the assumption that capitalism had reached a point at which it could no longer develop the productive forces. Capitalism continues to be able to develop them, but at a terrible price for humanity.

For the workers, real domination means in the first place that they no longer stand at the center of production: they become an appendage of machines and automated processes. The development of the specifically capitalist technology, that began to take shape in the early 19th century, evolved into Fordist⁷ mass production in the 20th century, and further into the IT-driven workplace of the 21st century, is the story of an ever deeper penetration of the value-form in the production process in which every aspect of productive activity is measured and reshaped in order to squeeze more surplus labor time from it.

It is also the story of an explosive growth of labor productivity, compared to which all previous efforts of humanity look small. The resulting cheapening of consumer goods improved some of the living conditions of the working class. The continuous scale-enhancement of capitalist production, of which it was both cause and result, has led to capitalism's conquest of the world, which means that the capital-labor relation has wiped out and replaced all pre-existing ones.

The conquest was not only outwards but inwards as well. The value-form and the social relations that instantiate it invades every "pore" of civil society, of socio-cultural and political existence, subjecting them to its imperatives. Not just the production and circulation of commodities, but *science* and *technology* too, upon which it increasingly depends, so central to the directional logic of capitalism, are now subject to the imperatives of the value-form itself. It is here that

⁷ By Fordist, we mean mass production based on standardization and chain assembly work in huge, vertically integrated factories. This form of production began in the late 19th century and had its apogee in the three decades following World War II.

the role of commodity *fetishism*, not simply as ideology, but as the way in which, under capitalism, social relations between persons are constructed and subjectively experienced as relations between commodities, between things, becomes such a formidable obstacle to the development of consciousness. It is as relations between things that social relations between human beings *appear* in capitalist society. This renders those social relations opaque and seemingly autonomous from their bases in the very activity of production and reproduction undertaken by the proletariat itself. The objectivity of value is neither *material* (physiological) nor metaphysical for Marx; it is purely *social*. It is an historically developed social relation produced and re-produced by the actions of human beings, by proletarians. Commodity *fetishism* obscures, distorts, "hides," the actual social relations that are congealed in the commodity, and seemingly turns them into a *natural* feature of the commodity itself. This fetishism is not simply a false consciousness imposed by the ruling class; it is also results from the actual lived reality of the proletariat. The very structures of the *social being* of proletarian existence itself generate its reified consciousness, and thereby its subjugation by the value-form. If in one sense, as Adorno pointed out, the value-form is an "illusion," it is in terms of social being "... the most real thing of all, the magic formula that has bewitched the world."⁸ The task of pro-revolutionaries is to expose and explode the commodity fetish in all its dimensions.

Real domination caused a vertiginous development of capitalist society, but it also developed its inherent contradictions. Capital, wealth, can take no other form than that of the commodity, exchangeable for other commodities. That means it must have a use-value (for somebody with money to buy it) and an exchange value, the content of which is abstract labor time, value. It cannot exist without either: if it has no use-value, it can't be sold, and if its production requires no labor time, none can be stolen, so there can be no surplus value or profit. Use value and value, the two sides of the commodity, must therefore develop hand in hand. But under real

⁸ "Sociology and Empirical Research" in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, p. 80.

domination, they become increasingly unhinged. Use-values grow exponentially through technification, a process in which living labor is subtracted, replaced by technology. But the growth of value requires that living labor-power is added. Capitalist society runs more and more on past labor (hardware and software). The pool of living labor, from which surplus value can be extracted, tendentially shrinks, despite the increasingly efficient fishing techniques. Tendentially, this leads to a relative decline of the *production* of new value while the exponential growth of use-values (of the capacity to produce them) clashes with the narrow basis on which the conditions of consumption in capitalism rest, and impedes the *realization* of value.

Real domination brought capitalism's crisis tendency to the fore. It is a crisis of profit, a crisis of overproduction, a financial crisis, but its roots are in the commodity in the breakdown of its unity. To this tendency, there are counter-tendencies: The increasing rate of relative surplus value extraction, the technologically induced global expansion, which also expanded the pool of living labor, and others. Still, capitalism cannot get rid of its crisis-tendencies. It can only overcome them through a massive devalorization of existing capital. It needs violent phases of destruction, either through depression or war, to restore conditions for new growth. History seems to indicate that the destruction required becomes ever larger the more real domination dominates.

“The violent destruction of capital not by relations external to it, but rather as a condition of its self-preservation, is the most striking form in which advice is given it to be gone and to give room to a higher state of social production.”⁹

Real domination also sharpens the most fundamental contradiction of capitalism: that between the social classes. Real domination developed technology, but with the aim to increase exploitation, to expand the portion of the workers' labor time that creates surplus-value, as opposed to that portion of the workers' labor time during which the equivalent of their means of subsistence (reproduction) is produced. Its directional logic demands that surplus labor-time

always increases at the expense of necessary labor time and that superfluous labor power be discarded; that the very reproduction of living labor be permanently sacrificed to the extraction of surplus-value.

“The labour process itself is no more than the instrument of the valorization process, just as the use-value of the product is nothing but a repository of its exchange-value. The self-valorization of capital –the creation of surplus-value- is therefore the determining, dominating and overriding purpose of the capitalist; it is the absolute motive and content of his activity. And in fact it is no more than the rationalized motive and aim of the hoarder –a highly impoverished and abstract content which makes it plain that the capitalist is just as enslaved by the relationships of capitalism as is his opposite pole, the worker, albeit in a quite different manner.”¹⁰

Quite different because the capitalists cannot break these chains but the collective worker can. Today, nothing short of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by the proletariat, and the *abolition* of the value-form, can put an end to the destruction that capitalism inexorably “produces” in the service of the imperative to valorize, to accumulate, value. Anything less, any proposal for reforms, however, “radical” it may seem, can only perpetuate the present infernal cycle of *destruction*.

⁹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, 1973, pp. 749-750.

¹⁰ Marx, “Results...”, op.cit., p.990

4. Another World is Possible



A demonstration in Barcelona with a sign that reads, “We are not Commodities” The problem is we are

Never was there such a glaring contrast between what is and what could be: on the one hand, capitalism, absurdly creating overproduction and massive hunger at the same time, causes ever more misery and threatens even the survival of the human species. On the other, today’s social knowledge, when liberated from the capitalist straitjacket, could free all humans from lack of food, housing, health care and other needs, and begin to repair the planet. The necessity to end capitalism is clear. But does the possibility exist as well? For revolution to be possible, there has to be a revolutionary subject, that is, a social force that has the capacity to carry it out.

That social force is the working class or proletariat. It is the part of the population which is compelled to sell its labor power to survive. Today that is the vast majority of humankind.

Some workers have permanent jobs, others work part-time or do temp-jobs, free-lance or for an agency. Some work in high tech, others in the ‘informal economy’ of the slums. More and more have precarious jobs or are unemployed, excluded from the production process yet still dependent on it. Some perform manual labor, others, a growing part of the working class, handle information (the *cognitariat*). But, regardless of

those differences and of the discrepancies in income and working conditions, the working class is unified in its separation from the means of its own reproduction, which are owned by capital and used for its accumulation. Therefore, there is a fundamental antagonism between the capitalist class and the working class. It exists not only during periods of open class struggle (strikes, demonstrations, blockades, occupations, riots, etc.), but also in the daily reality of exploitation, the extraction of surplus value from the working class.

Over the course of its history, capitalism has undergone tremendous changes, and so has the working class. The question of how these objective changes have affected the working class subjectively is a complex one. But it can be observed that the most elementary form of class consciousness, the sense of belonging to a class with common interests, is less evident today than it was in previous periods.

Initially, in its phase of “formal domination,” capital took control over production and society at large, but it was a control from above, from outside the actual labor processes and social interactions. The latter were not yet penetrated and shaped by the value-form. That allowed for a relative autonomous space in which the proletariat could develop its own culture, its own organizations, which gave concrete forms to its class consciousness. Furthermore, capital appeared openly as the class enemy since its chief means of accumulation consisted in lengthening the working day (*absolute* surplus value extraction). In addition, there was the enormous weight of the pre-capitalist past on the young proletariat. On the positive side, its communal traditions fed into its class consciousness. With the transition to the real domination of capital beginning in the 19th century, and evolving into “Fordism” in the next, the autonomous space shrank, but the concentration of workers in huge factories and dense working class neighborhoods also reinforced a sense of common cause.

The revolutionary wave which swelled at the end of World War I showed that class consciousness can become revolutionary consciousness, but its failure also showed the incompleteness of that transition.

Today, the value-form has not only deeply penetrated the labor processes themselves, breaking them up into quantities of time that must constantly be shortened to squeeze more surplus value from them, it has also reproduced itself all over the planet and in all areas of civil society. Everything and everyone is reduced to a quantum of value, of money or the lack thereof, a part of the global market.

Mass production has greatly increased the availability of consumer goods for the working class, which has affected its social practices. Formatted as consumers, workers are being individualized, atomized, with no more power to change things than as an individual voter, a consumer of the products of the political market. In recent decades in particular, capitalism has sought to further increase separation in the working class, decentralizing housing and production, fanning competition between individual workers.

Today there is no longer a space, free from the value-form, in which proletarian culture can develop without being absorbed into the market. There is less evidence of class consciousness, but that does not mean classes have disappeared.

Objectively, the working class is more unified than it ever was. By this, we mean that the production process has become more socialized, more global and interdependent than ever. Production is less the sum of the efforts of individual workers than a collective, collaborative application of social knowledge. The working class became, as Marx put it, the *Gesamtarbeiter*, the collective worker.¹¹

Furthermore, because the increasing complexity of the production process demanded it, the collective worker is more literate, more informed, more skilled, more creatively intelligent than the working class had ever been before. Its greater distance from the pre-capitalist past may have removed it further from collective traditions but also from obscurantism and magical thinking, from “*the muck of ages*”, as Marx called it.

It is because the collective worker produces both the value that capitalism depends upon for its

¹¹ Marx, “Results ...” *ibid.*, p. 1040

survival, and the social wealth that society depends upon for its survival, that it has the capacity to free society from its dependency on capitalism, on value.

However, it has this capacity only potentially. Even if capitalism were to collapse this very day and abandon its control over society, the collective worker would not know what to do with it for lack of revolutionary consciousness.

The working class is not born with revolutionary consciousness. Some think that all that separates the class from it are bourgeois mystifications, ideological fog that prevents it from seeing reality as it is. Once this fog evaporates as a result of the experience of the struggle and of revolutionary propaganda, clear consciousness will emerge. But it's not that simple. Ideology is not, or not only, a foreign substance injected by capitalism into the proletarian brain. It also comes from within the working class which as a category of capitalism reproduces the value-form, the existing society in its daily practices, and thus also the ideologies it generates. The fog that prevents the collective worker from seeing the cause of its misery and the possibility to end it is the value-form. It has occupied the world of workers just like the rest of society.

That doesn't mean that the working class is integrated, if by that it is meant that the contradiction between the classes has disappeared. The immanent conflict remains. It is true that the two classes are bound together. Each one exists because of the other, and together they reproduce society. But there's a big difference. From this relation, capital cannot extract itself. No matter how much it wishes it could, it cannot survive without the collective worker, the creator of value. But the collective worker can autonomize itself from this relation. It does not need capital. But before this sinks in, a lot has to happen.

Consider this. If our analysis is right, the crisis of capitalism will deepen in the years to come. The attacks on the working class will accelerate. They will meet resistance. Workers cannot defend themselves individually. They need to join together in order to gain critical weight, so unification of struggles will be pursued, the more the attacks of capital are aimed at ever-more

victims. Of course those struggles will be recuperated many times. But the sheer size of the resistance may move the goal-posts. Together with a growing awareness of class power, an awareness of what's possible can grow. Meanwhile, direct attacks on the value-form will spread. Riots and looting but also occupation of housing and public spaces, free clinics and other production for needs instead of money, free exchange of digital goods...

Revolution is necessary, Marx thought, "Not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way" but also because communism requires, "the alteration of men on a mass scale which can take place only in a practical movement" (*The German Ideology*): An alteration of consciousness that can only occur in a context of class struggle. The deepening crisis implies that the collective worker's resistance against capital's attacks on its living and working conditions is ultimately doomed, as long as it stays a defensive struggle. Yet, defensive struggles will be important in that process of transforming consciousness, not only because their limits must be experienced but also because they can unify workers, bring them together, which in turn affects consciousness, increasing awareness of the class' potential power.

Capitalism is increasingly unable to ensure the social reproduction of the working class, and workers find ways to do it themselves. The struggle for daily survival and the struggle against capitalism merge when workers invent solutions to meet the direct needs that capitalism denies, like housing, health care and so on, by re-orienting productive activity to create real wealth instead of value, within a context of collective struggle that challenges capitalism's political control.

It is only through the experience of the struggle that the collective worker can feel its strength and unleash its creativity, establish other forms of production and distribution which will open practical pathways to the overthrow of capitalism.

The collective worker stands before a double, seemingly contradictory, task: on the one hand, it has to unify on a class basis, become the collective worker subjectively as well objectively, in order to

gain the power to overthrow capitalism. On the other hand, it also has to abolish itself. A revolution that ends capitalism is a revolution that ends wage-labor, and ends the rule of labor-time. That is the root. Its eradication is not a future result of the revolution, it is the revolution itself.

There is no contradiction if revolution is understood as a process in which the strength generated by a joining of forces in defensive struggles in the workplaces dialectically interacts with direct assaults on the value-form as the foundation of human interaction. Eventually, the two can merge. It is not pre-ordained, but it's a real possibility.

A lot more needs to be understood about how revolutionary consciousness might develop. We see this as a primary theoretical task of the present historical moment.

5. But it is not Inevitable

If pro-revolutionaries appear to be continually talking about the crisis of capitalism, it is because capitalism is not only a system *in* crisis, but also a system *of* crisis. Crises are a part of its normal, cyclical development. As Marx stressed, a crisis is not only a manifestation of the fact that the valorization of capital has run into obstacles, but it is also a (temporary) solution to this problem, by causing the devalorization of existing capital (including variable capital, the workers) and thus lowering production costs, thereby laying the ground for a new period of growth. The duration of the latter may vary but it always ends in crisis again. The duration and depth of the crises vary too. The capitalist class has become clever in postponing and containing crises, through financial, fiscal and other policies, but that only results in a deeper crisis later on, which demands more devalorization, more destruction, more violence and hunger, so that value can grow again.

The human toll wrought by crisis has increased exponentially: Repeated collapse on a global scale; two world wars; a series of genocidal conflicts around the globe over the past half-century, in which atavistic ideologies based on nationalism, tribalism, and religious sectarianism, have provided the “fuel” for mass murder; and ecological disasters in which science and technology, themselves historically based on the

imperatives of valorizing value, and serving that very end, are threatening the very existence of life on the planet.

Yet, this simple observation has led to a dangerous misconception about capitalist reality. Given the cannibalistic, self-destructive, nature of capitalism, many of those who call themselves Marxists, dating back even to Marx's lifetime, developed a deterministic and teleological view of capitalism which forecasts an inevitable final crisis through which a socialist society will *inevitably* emerge. Within the writings and practice of the Second and Third Internationals, there was a strong leaning toward the view that the victory of “socialism” over “capitalism” was a foregone conclusion. Even within the analysis of the Communist Left, in both its German-Dutch and Italian variants, a deterministic view of the inevitability of the “triumph of the revolution” was easily perceivable.

Time and time again, pro-revolutionaries sought signs that pointed to the “final” or *death* crisis of capitalism in economic collapse and war only to see the “moment” pass, and the cycle of valorization begin again, as surplus-value was pumped out of a defeated working class. Capitalism's *crises* are inevitable, but proletarian revolution and communism are *not!*

Many “Marxists” have pointed to numerous events in the twentieth century (the Russian Revolution, the “Great Depression” (1929), even the “great recession of 2008” as the beginning of the end, but capitalism has proven more resilient than they anticipated. It has stubbornly refused to die; it must be killed. And that requires not simply a devastating economic crisis or even an inter-imperialist world war, but a revolutionary *subject*, armed with a *class consciousness*, itself based not just on class hatred, but rather on a comprehension of the actual trajectory of capitalism which necessarily produces both crises and wars; a consciousness that can break through the opaqueness of capitalist social relations.

But rather than producing a rich theoretical understanding of capitalism and its trajectory, traditional “Marxists” from Social-Democracy, Stalinism, and Trotskyism, have become akin to doomsday soothsayers endlessly predicting the final days and the inevitability of communism only to be disproven by reality, and once again recycling their theoretical and political errors.

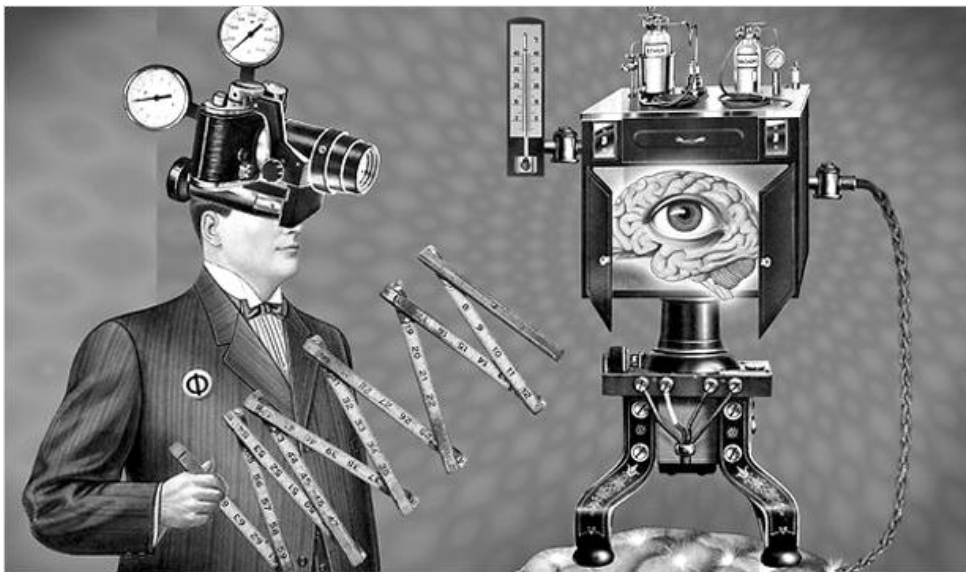
This is not the view of Internationalist Perspective. While IP maintains that communism, the creation of a human community, is the hope of the human race, IP rejects the idea that the

outcome is assured, determined by the purported *laws* of history.

Capitalism is a relation between people, hidden by a relation between things. The value-form expresses the exploitation of men by men, but it hides it too, making it seem as if the world of value, of wage labor and class society are natural and normal. This is false; capitalism and class society are not eternal. They are the products of history and circumstances, but neither option was inevitable and neither is the future course of capitalism. Capitalism provokes struggles which can in turn lead to the development of a new consciousness which sees the world without wage labor, without value production, without classes.

The conceptualization of the world in a different way, in which work is no longer wage-labor, in which it is done to meet needs instead of to make profits, in which the value-form is abolished, must therefore grow in the praxis of the struggles which the crisis of capitalism provokes.

It is this struggle, the struggle to develop a practice that will change the world which must be fought, rather than waiting for a proletarian Godot. The final crisis of capitalism will be its overthrow by the working class.



6. The State can never be ours

Among the most pernicious myths haunting the revolutionary movement since its inception, is the illusion that the modern state has some degree of autonomy or neutrality in relation to the social balance of power, specifically in relation to capitalism. That the state can be captured and directed towards revolutionary ends, or that its institutions can be pressured to alleviate the worst conditions of the proletariat while simultaneously acting as a stepping stone towards revolutionary consciousness and self-organization, is at the heart of this myth. We are categorically opposed to the idea that any institution of the state can be used for revolutionary anti-capitalist purposes. In short, we are opposed to all tendencies of “reformism” as futile and dangerously misleading attempts to manage the accumulation of capital for the benefit of humanity.

The modern state has its origins with the emergence of capitalism; not as a parallel development to the economic formation of society, but as an essential instrument that was constitutive of those same capitalist social relations. The state is not a machine that can be used to promote contradictory causes; its essential purpose is to subordinate and to regulate – often through extra-economic means—social life to the needs of capitalist accumulation. Put another way, the state’s purpose is to socialize the antagonistic private interests within a civil society dominated by the value-form, thereby assuring its continued functioning.

The modern state can be distinguished by two essential characteristics: 1) its political separation from civil society and 2) the fusion of all state institutions into the mechanism of capital accumulation and value formation.

In most pre-capitalist social formations, production, distribution and consumption formed part of an organic whole; in addition, the social hierarchies in such societies were formed within a unity of the political, social and economic relations. One’s political position at the time was usually commensurate with one’s economic position. Capitalism, however, began a long process of dissolving these unities, “liberating” them so to speak, and re-establishing them in a

competitive market environment enabled and mediated by the money-form of value. But such dissociating of the former unity was dangerously unsustainable in and of itself as it activated powerful antagonistic forces that could threaten social existence. It was then, in the formation of an autonomous political realm, that the modern state was able to form the institutions that advanced the interests of capital while containing and regulating its centrifugal tendencies. The citizens of the ‘free-state,’ Marx observed, lead a double life. In their real lives in civil society, i.e. economic society, they feel themselves isolated and at war with everyone else in the defense of their private interests. And in their imaginary lives as citizens of the state they are integrated into and at one with the world in theory but not in practice. The separation between the political and the economic was and is an essential component that enables the tendential logic of capital to unfold according to the imperative of value-formation. The state does not inscribe in law directly the mode of production. This appears as the mystical sub-stratum of social existence. But the autonomy of the economy is guaranteed by the state precisely by making the mode of production untouchable.

At the subjective level, the sovereign rights-bearing citizen of the democratic state has a close relationship to the sovereign consumer in the free market, and it is the state’s function to protect this relationship. At the social level, all of the institutional organizations of the modern state serve essentially to ensure the continual accumulation of capital in realms of *production*, *circulation* and the supply of *free-labor*. In the realm of *production*, the state guarantees a money supply along with a stable banking and credit system, it protects native capital from competition through tariffs and trade agreements, it supports a legal system that insures the sanctity of the contracts between sovereign parties, it invests in research and development for future production via military research, university funding and grants to private research institutions, and it regulates access to natural resources. In the realm of *circulation*, the state provides an infrastructure contoured to the precise needs of

capital accumulation, it seeks to expand markets internationally through direct military intervention, through financial tools and trade policy and it encourages consumption through credit regulation etc. Finally, and most essentially, it guarantees an adequate supply of *free-labor* by ensuring that the supply always exceeds the demand to secure capital's domination over labor. This is done through numerous long-term and short-term strategies like changes in immigration policies, birth-control regulations, opening pathways to offshore production, labor-laws that regulate wages, pensions, benefits etc. But, beyond the supply of labor, the state's role in *disciplining labor* is critical, and here we see capital's gradual penetration into the social body and the absorption of the collective worker into the mechanism of production via the vast network of educational institutions, prisons, medical institutions, along with the vast network of policing and 24/7 surveillance. This control also includes drug policies, housing policies, welfare access and the control of information.

When seen in this light, all of the institutional forms of the modern state respond to the needs of capital accumulation through both economic and extra-economic means. The fundamental purpose of every state institution is to modulate social life for the benefit of capital. We might compare any single institution of the state to the accelerator of an automobile. An accelerator can increase the rate of acceleration or it can decrease it, but it cannot change its function in relation to the car, nor can it alter the purpose of the car. Labor law can increase the minimum wage or it can decrease it, but it cannot eliminate labor. It serves to only temporarily affect the rate of surplus-value extraction via the wage. Any short-term victory via the state—through its laws and institutions—in the end will be a Pyrrhic victory in that the belief required in the institutions further *subjectivates* ¹²

¹² Subjectivation, a word translated from the French *assujétissement*, used by Althusser and Foucault to mean simultaneously forming and regulating the subject. The human subject is not pre-formed, a *natural* being, possessing an a-historical essence, but rather is an historically produced being, a socio-cultural being, whose characteristics -- beyond the biological -- are an emanation of the social *relations* in which it is enmeshed, on the bases of which it has been shaped or produced, characteristics which are modifiable, transformable, by human action or *praxis*.

the proletariat to a form of capital accumulation. Every movement that seeks reform through state institutions embeds the proletariat deeper into the machinery of the state. If it is unable to free itself from the pathways already laid out before it by the state and its institutions, the proletariat will fail to activate its own capacities for creative self-organization.

The modern state, irrespective of its form of appearance (the Bismarckian state, the liberal state, the social democratic welfare state, the corporate state, the racial state, the Soviet state, the neo-liberal state, etc.) structures and imposes a particular strategy of accumulation. The appearance of different regimes of accumulation results from challenges that include the class struggle, geo-political positioning, technological innovations, competition between capitals or economic crises, but all states constitute *regimes of capital accumulation* seeking various means and strategies to accumulate capital without realizing that they are in a race towards self-destruction. The only viable revolutionary position possible is anti-capitalist at its root. All efforts to direct the workers' movement toward the "improved" management of capital rest on the idea that the state is an autonomous mechanism that can be turned against its own *raison d'être*. Moreover, "democracy" as both ideology and a complex of political institutions provides a formidable weapon through which the population, including the proletariat, can actually be bound to the capitalist state and mobilized to defend it. Democracy, then, is intimately linked to *nationalism* which binds the proletariat and the mass of the population of *every* country to its ruling class and to capital.

But if the working class cannot simply seize the capitalist state and use it to its own purpose, what of the contention by Trotskyists, Leninists and others that after a proletarian revolution, the working class must first establish a *workers state*, a so-called "Republic of Labor"? And what then of *democracy* in such a proletarian state? The grim reality of the Bolshevik state that emerged under Lenin, and then Stalin, that dictatorship *over* the

proletariat; that historically specific path to a state capitalist form of extraction of surplus-value from the proletariat and capital accumulation, constitutes not the triumph of the proletariat, but the triumph of counter-revolution. Indeed, even in the form of a state based on the dictatorship of

the *worker's councils*, with delegates elected and *revocable* by the workers who democratically elected them, the result would *not* be communization so long as the workers are subjected to labor-time accounting and the value-form.

7. Real Wealth Versus Value

Capitalism is based on exploitation, on paying workers less than the value they produce, and pocketing the difference, the surplus value. At first sight then, in order to end capitalism, it would suffice to give back the surplus value to those who produced it, so that workers get, individually or collectively, the full value of the labor time they perform. This would not end the value-form, the unspoken common understanding of the world, of work and its products, of people and things, as value, quantities of abstract labor time. People would still produce (private or state) property, to be sold and bought with money in one form or another. Only a redistribution of value would have been achieved, while the foundation of capitalist society would remain untouched. On this foundation, capitalism would survive, albeit through crises and chaos.

Redistribution of wealth is the rallying cry of the capitalist left today. Its claim is that the economic crisis results from lack of demand which would disappear if money taken from the rich would be used to raise the buying power of the many. Given that overproduction is a fact, and that the gap between rich and poor has grown to obscene proportions, this argument is attractive. But it is based on a misunderstanding of what it is that is produced and accumulated, on a misunderstanding of value.

First, value and real wealth are not the same. Real wealth is not the purpose of capitalist production. Commodities must have a concrete use-value, but this is only a vehicle to transmit abstract value, whose accumulation all capitalists are compelled to seek. That is the real purpose. Real wealth is only created in so far as it serves this purpose, in so far as it creates new value, capitalist wealth. A redistribution of wealth would not change this. It would not remove the obligation of production to

be profitable, it would not end exploitation. Real wealth would still only be produced in so far as it embodies surplus-value, and be sacrificed and wasted for the purpose of valorizing value.

Secondly, value and money are not the same. Yet it is money, taken from the rich or newly created, that the capitalist left wants to use to end the crisis, to save capitalism from itself. It is true that money has power over the entire world of commodities, that it gives access to all wealth in capitalist society, because it can be transformed into any other form of value. In its totality, money represents value as a whole, the commodities that are circulating as well as the treasure, the hoard of accumulated wealth. In the latter, value is preserved and grows, but only in so far as it remains connected, directly or indirectly, to the creation of new value. The total hoard is the total bank of capital, sending value into the productive sphere when profit beckons, withdrawing from it when profits fall. The value of the hoard grows, because the value that is produced and realized grows; it feeds on it. It can't grow on its own. Therefore a crisis of profit in industry and commerce leads to a devalorization of the hoard, of possessions in general.

To prevent this, capitalism has, especially in the last 60 years, increasingly sought refuge in money-creation, either to stimulate production and consumption, or to stimulate the growth of the hoard, propping up its "value" despite a declining rate of value creation in the real economy. In other words, a massive creation of fictitious capital, not resulting from new value but created out of thin air, has been mixed into the pot. Money has grown at an increasingly faster pace than "the real economy", that is, than the value of the commodities that are actually produced and sold. Therefore, it must devalue.

But that only happens when production and consumption are stimulated despite the lack of profitability. The result is high inflation, endangering the value of money as such and thus of the entire hoard.

A second approach has been more efficient: by forking over newly-created money directly to capital (meanwhile demanding austerity from the rest of society), the hoard has been successfully defended. Most of that new money never enters into circulation except within the hoard itself. It therefore causes no inflation (again, except in the hoard). While propping up the demand for financial assets, the money is sterilized in the coffers of central and private banks in the fortunes of the super-rich. There, it does no good (only a small fraction of it re-enters the productive sphere) but also no harm. Precisely by not re-entering the circulation of commodities, the hoard hides the fictitious nature of the money that is created without a corresponding creation of value. The program of the capitalist left would accomplish the opposite and reveal the fiction. And it is on this fiction that capitalism rests. The belief that money is value and that value is real wealth. If that belief falters, capitalism breaks down.

The hoard must be defended at all costs because the belief that wealth/value/money can be endlessly accumulated is essential for capitalism to function. It would be rudderless without it. That is what the capitalist left faces when it comes to power. It has to swallow its promises and act as a good manager of the national capital, the protector of its hoard. If it refuses, capital will flee, and its hoard will collapse.

The growth of the gap between rich and poor, or between the rich and all the rest, is a consequence of the crisis, not its cause. It reflects the growing need to defend the value of the hoard, when the creation of new value lags. It reflects the need to increase exploitation, to cut costs. It reflects the tendency of value to withdraw from unprofitable production and to flee into the hoard. It reflects value's search for safe havens and the fear of all capitals of not being one.

The struggle for a more just capitalism is a dead-end, and therefore a trap. Value has its iron logic, which cannot be bent at will. The very belief that wealth = value = money must disappear in practice, for real wealth to be liberated and become true to its social nature.



8: The End of Labor

Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1845), in discussing *communism* spoke of previous revolutions as only entailing a different distribution of labor [*Arbeit*] while the communist revolution “does away with *labour*.¹³ In *Capital*, however, Marx described labor as “... the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence”¹⁴ Is labor, for Marx, a trans-historical condition of human being OR is labor yoked to historically specific social formations based on private property? It seems impossible to conceive human existence without *production*, and, therefore, communism or a human community will know production and the activity or *praxis* that underpins it.

But the young Marx's critique of productive activity as labor, now in the virtually universal social form of *abstract* labor, still constitutes the basis for any vision of communism. The abstract labor that is the basis of capitalism entails the reduction of the different modes of concrete labor that produces use-values (useful things) to a homogeneous, indeterminate, labor measured solely by *time*, the socially necessary labor time that it takes to produce the good. It is that abstract labor which is the basis of the production of *value*. Communism is the abolition of abstract labor as the basis of social being. It means ending the valuation of things and people on the basis of the abstract labor time they contain or produce. It means the end of wage-labor, the end of monetized social relations, the end of class society. It means the abolition of the separation

between humans and their means of production and the products of their work.

This stands in stark contrast with the conceptualization of communism as a “republic of labor” in which the working class, after having overthrown capitalist rule, becomes itself the ruling class. In this vision, dear to traditional Marxism, wage-labor persists, but the working class is no longer exploited because the remuneration of the worker would be based on the full *value* that his/her labor had produced. Far from abolishing abstract labor and the domination of value that is the basis of *capitalism* and the proletarian condition upon which that mode of production is based, such a vision actually universalizes that selfsame proletarian condition, while leaving the very nature of proletarian labor intact, and thereby leaves the value-form itself to continue to shape human existence.

The later Marx's most detailed statement on communism can be found in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), in which he outlined his conception of a lower and higher stage of communism. For Marx, in the lower stage of communism, “just as it emerges from capitalist society” -- still stamped by its social forms -- “the individual producer gets back from society ... exactly what he has given to it [by his labor].”¹⁵ As Marx acknowledged, “Clearly, the same principle is at work here as that which regulates the exchange of commodities as far as this is an exchange of equal values.” Again, as Marx recognized “... a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for the same amount in another.”¹⁶ For Marx, then, the value-form would still preside over both production and distribution in the lower stage of communism, however different its political institutions might be (e.g. a proletarian or workers state). Workers would receive only the value that their direct labor produced. And most significantly, the worker would be in thrall, subject, to the *clock*. Labor *time* would still determine the worker's share of

¹³ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p.52. In a critique of the German economist Friedrich List, the young Marx said “‘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’....” “Draft of an Article on Friedrich List's Book *Das nationale System der politischen Oekonomie*” in Marx and Engels *Collected Works*, vol 4 (New York: International Publishers, 1965), pp.278-279).

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1 (Penguin), p.290.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme” in Karl Marx, *The First International and After* (Penguin), p. 346.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the social wealth – and with it the prospect that the state might focus on the expansion of surplus labor even to the detriment of necessary labor (that labor necessary to the reproduction – social and physical -- of the workers themselves). For the Marx of the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, then, it would only be in its higher stage that the human species could “... cross the narrow horizon of bourgeois right and inscribe on its banner: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!”¹⁷ Until then, the value-form, and its “logic” would continue to preside over human existence.

How would this “lower stage of communism” function? In the late 1920’s, having confronted the defeat of the Russian Revolution and the beginning of the horrors of the Stalinist counter-revolution, the German-Dutch left addressed this question. In their “Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution”, they sought to explain how in a post-revolutionary society, *after* the revolution had triumphed, production and distribution would take place. The formula for the remuneration of workers was to be a system of “labor vouchers,” which each worker would receive, based on labor-*time* accounting: vouchers equivalent to the number of hours worked based on a standard of socially necessary labor time for the production of a given “item.”¹⁸ But this vision still implies the reduction of all labor to abstract labor (socially necessary labor time) and therefore does not eliminate the value-form and the subjection of humankind to it imperatives. Indeed, that vision, seemingly so radical, risks the perpetuation of the laws of motion of *capitalism*, and its social relations, albeit in new – though potentially no less vicious – forms. Neither the *content* of the work performed, nor its *measure* (labor *time*) will have changed. Yet it is precisely that content that must be transformed, as well as the way in which its contribution to or satisfaction of social needs and desires is appreciated, if we are to escape the subordination of humankind to the imperative of value and of *labor*. If the capitalist class is expropriated, but production and consumption

continue to be regulated by the exchange of equivalents, the value form persists and will create pathways to accumulation and to the emergence of a separate class to manage the value system. A revolution that would accomplish only the “lower stage of communism” would dig its own grave. It is the historically specific mode in which labor has existed in capitalist society, abstract labor yoked to labor *time* accounting, measured by *socially necessary labor time*, subject to the *diktat* of the clock, that must be immediately abolished.

Communization is *not* the outcome of a period of transition, at the end of which communism can then be established. The very revolutionary *process* itself entails the abolition of labor and of labor-time accounting. Even in the midst of revolutionary upheavals, where scarcity and hunger may well prevail, modes of rationing based on an equitable distribution of goods according to *need* would be preferable to a mode of distribution based on labor-time, which would institutionalize the value-form and its imperatives. Only on that basis can the horrors of capitalism be safely placed in the trash can of history.

Beyond labor there will be *production*, productive activity, surely, but no longer production extorted from a laboring class by an exploiting class. There is a fundamental distinction between the historically specific modes of *labor* of the slave, the corvée laborer in Ming China or ancient Egypt, the encomiendas of colonial Latin America and the plantation slavery of the Americas, as well as the waged labor of the proletariat, on the one hand, and the activity, the *work*, of the early hunter, fisher, gatherer, the inhabitant of a peasant commune, the medieval artisan, however different each is, and, most importantly what Marx termed the “social individual” of a future human *Gemeinwesen*, on the other. These are not mere terminological distinctions between modes of human activity, but rather differences between historically and qualitatively very different modes of the metabolism between humankind and nature. Communization, then, entails production and forms of work *beyond* labor.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 347.

¹⁸ See Group of International Communists: “Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution” (1930) <http://www.marists.org/subject/left-wing/gik/1930>

9: For a Renaissance of Marxism



Down with all statues

Many political and intellectual currents – revolutionary and reactionary - have claimed to be Marxist. Some say Marxism is a philosophy, *the* dialectical method, or a science, a toolbox, a system even. So what are *we* to make of it today, nearly a century and a half after Marx published *Capital*?

Marx's body of work – social reality within the evolution of the capitalist socio-economic system, seen from the point of view of the proletariat – was and is under a continuing process of development. Marx began his revolutionary life with a critique of philosophy and developed no philosophical system of his own; this would have been meaningless to him. His focus moved with the circumstances of historico-social developments: the 1848 upheavals across Europe, the American Civil War, the 1870 Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune being the most significant. His most systematic work – his critique of bourgeois political economy – has left

us with an important legacy especially in its illumination of the specific nature of capitalist exploitation, capital's ravenous hunger for expanded reproduction and the roots of its economic crises. Despite the enormity of this aspect of his work, this “economic shit” as he described it, is only a part of his contribution.

Those who came after him took up and developed aspects of his work. All that followed along his pathways suffered to a greater or lesser extent from the fact that much of his writings were unknown and unpublished; this is still the case. Interpretations of what was extant were colored by incompleteness and by the interests of the interpreters who were of various philosophical schools and who adopted different stances with respect to world events, to the institutions supporting the real domination of capital and most importantly to the struggles of the proletariat. In their hands, “Marxism” divided into a multitude of theoretical and ideological

tributaries. Marx cannot be held accountable for what others developed out of his writings after his death.

Nonetheless, Marx was responsible for his theories and the actions they guided during his lifetime. Thus, his early deterministic and stage-ist theories led him to congratulate Lincoln on his re-election even while the first industrialized war was still in the course of murdering over half a million proletarians¹⁹. In the Franco-Prussian War he switched positions in line with his assessment as to which outcome would hasten capitalism's development, and therefore the possibility of proletarian revolution. In his early work on Asia, he saw only the progress being brought by the development of trade with Europe and the opening up of the world market; only later did he condemn the atrocities of the colonial penetrations of China, India and elsewhere. He also changed his view that the sole driver of social upheavals was the penetration of European capital to a perspective that recognized the play of indigenous social dynamics (even in the "living fossil" of China). Thus, over his lifetime his early uni-linear vision of social developments matured into a much more multi-linear perspective; on the way we can identify many errors of judgment.

Marx's theoretical legacy is therefore no more than it could have been: crucial systematic studies, valuable insights, and some errors among them. This is not a belittlement but an acknowledgement that much of his valuable legacy is in his relentless quest for understanding, in the concreteness and the totality of his approach and in its revolutionary standpoint. To benefit from his work requires that we today consider the whole of this legacy critically and in its historical context.

Marx has provided us with the essential critical weapon useable to develop a revolutionary theory fit for the circumstances of today's 21st Century world, despite the fact that he did not live through the 20th Century to see the *actual* historical

trajectory of a century and more of the real domination of capital, to see the hell it has created for humanity: the orgies of warfare and the threat of annihilation, the astounding levels of exploitation and a revolutionary subject which has gone through such changes as to make it unrecognizable to the 19th Century eye. In this time there has been only one proletarian revolutionary wave – and that did not occur under the conditions that Marx had envisaged. Although there is much value to be gained in retracing his footsteps through the 19th Century theoretical territory he inhabited, there is much more value to be obtained viewing the development of his work from our 21st Century vantage point.

This vantage point includes perspectives brought to us not only through the experience and knowledge passed on by pro-revolutionaries but also in the researches of humanities scholars and scientists that can contribute to a greater understanding of society and its revolutionary subject, the proletariat. The big question – how can the proletariat, our revolutionary subject, in the face of an economic crisis, take it upon itself to destroy capitalism and build communism – remains unanswered. Unless progress is made on this question, the perspective of a communist future for humanity – insofar as it is expressed in revolutionary theory – will be based on a pious hope, with our salvation dependent on a class of automatons impelled by history.

Marx's insights offer the only way forward to answer the big question – but it will only be successful if we develop a revitalized Marxian approach which aims to illuminate the interaction between the nature of the revolutionary subject and the dynamics of capitalism; a Marxian approach that can explain both the prospects for the self-activity of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject, as well as the formidable obstacles it confronts in the commodity fetishism and the value-form to which it is subjected by capitalist social relations. That's why we need a *renaissance* of Marxism.

In his later years Marx was concerned to master the new findings in the anthropological studies that were greatly expanding in the late 19th Century and which cast more light on social dynamics in different cultures, evidently believing

¹⁹ In addition the policies of the US federal government as expressed in the Indian Removal Act of 1830 legitimated ethnic cleansing as a means of creating a 'lebensraum' for the development of capital and the importation of millions of proletarians from Europe, and enforced by the US army.

that they could contribute to further develop his revolutionary theory. In his introduction to *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*, Lawrence Krader concludes by saying: "Regarding the future of society, and the lessons to be learned from the past, we get no guidance save that which we can work out for ourselves." Although Krader's

comments were directed towards one aspect of Marx's work, they could well be addressed to the corpus as a whole, containing as they do a leitmotif for a renaissance of Marxism: "We get no guidance save that which we can work out for ourselves."



10. For Political Organization

The term "political organization of the proletariat" more easily evokes images of the past than a picture of the present and future. And these images of the past are clearly obsolete and often very negative. So why even speak of "political organization"? Can we give another, positive content to this term today?

In the past ...

Marxists of different kinds have advocated different models of organization. The term "proletarian political organization" inevitably evokes the social democratic parties and trade unions which in the 19th century organized and educated the working class, and directed the struggle for reforms for a shorter working day, limiting the work of children and women, etc. The party was a place where the working class was organized, unified and became aware of its identity. While this was possible when capitalism had only a formal grip on society under its real

domination when it penetrates all the pores of society and absorbs all institutions into the fabric of its market, this model is clearly obsolete. Mass parties and trade unions have become integral parts of the functioning of capitalism. When push comes to shove, they always defend the national capital, its competitive position, its need to valorize, its need to wage war.

Another image of the past is that of the Bolshevik Party, leader of the Russian Revolution. The Bolshevik conception was that of a party, based on a disciplined cadre of professional pro-revolutionaries that could seize power and direct the state in the name of proletarian interests. But that state quickly turned against the councils of workers and soldiers and repressed the working class. The Communist Parties, grouped in the Third International, supported, not the movement of emancipation of the proletariat, but the interests of the Russian state. This model of the "ruling party", which substitutes itself for the

proletariat, which takes over the very cogs of the capitalist state, we obviously reject.

Both “communists” (Leninists) and “socialists” (social democrats) aim to conquer the state, either gradually and legally or violently, but in all cases under the leadership of their party, which will not destroy the state but manage it better. The lie of “socialism in one country” replaced the “Proletarians have no fatherland” of the Communist Manifesto. Within the Third International, opposition arose only from minoritarian left fractions who continued to defend a revolutionary and thus internationalist perspective, and were consequently pushed out of the Third International.

While they had that pro-revolutionary foundation in common, the Communist Left had many disagreements, especially on political organization. The division was especially stark between the Italian Left and the German-Dutch Left. The first defended, like Lenin, that revolution required the leadership of the Party. Even though most drew from the defeat of the Russian Revolution the lesson that the party should not man the state, they insisted on the need to build the Party to give direction to the struggle. The German-Dutch Left on the other hand claimed that parties and trade unions were obsolete organizations of the past; that the new workers movement was based on spontaneous autonomous action and would be led, not by parties or unions, but by workers councils.

Today, those who claim the heritage of the Italian Left are still building their Party. As for those who identify with the tradition of the German-Dutch Left, most of them have concluded that, since the workers will be compelled by objective conditions to overthrow capitalism anyway, political organizations are superfluous at best. This position, which was not defended by the original German-Dutch Left, but is not inconsistent with its deterministic framework, is known as “councilism.”

We reject both party building and councilism. The roots of these mistakes are theoretical. They are both grounded in a schematic, fatally simplistic, understanding of historic change.

And today?

At the time of the real domination of capitalism, not only over the economy of the planet, but also over the physical, social, intellectual life of the proletariat, what content can we give to the term “political organization”? It is clear to us that its role is not to educate the workers, nor to lead their movements, or to formulate their demands or slogans. Nor is it to be cheerleaders or activists trying to fan every fire, or academics purifying theory for its own sake.

What do we see as our role then? In brief: to develop a Marxist theory linked to the prospects for a revolutionary praxis. A theory that rejects any kind of determinism (“the revolution is inevitable”), that rejects all teleological visions (“the proletariat has the historic mission to bring about Communism”), a theory that reveals the conditions for revolutionary change, that is to say, that identifies the material presuppositions of an objective possibility (the overthrow of capitalism, communism), and links those to the process of becoming of the revolutionary subject, of the social force that can do it. This process is not predetermined, which is why the development and propagation of revolutionary theory makes sense, otherwise it would just be sand in the wind. Without this process, the objective possibility of revolution means nothing. Consciousness is the key-factor.

There are those who claim that the stark reality of capitalism’s horrors will make the choice for revolution self-evident. That it will become crystal-clear that capitalism is doomed and communism is the only solution. Unfortunately, it’s not that simple. While these horrors are visible to all, how they relate to the social relation capital-labor, to the value-form that makes everything and everyone a commodity, is hidden in a myriad ways. It is hidden by ideologies, but also by engrained social practices, themselves shaped by the value-form, which prevent the collective imagination from seeing beyond capitalist normality. To remove that opacity should be the aim of all pro-revolutionary political organizations.

Just as the proletariat of today is more fragmented and diverse than it has ever been, so

too are the pro-revolutionary organizations. They come from various theoretical backgrounds: Marxism, anarchism, the theory of communization, etc. IP recognizes this diversity and works to network between groups. No individual or group possesses the whole truth. Political organization allows the confrontation of ideas, networking, debates and discussion from which may arise new clarification on capitalism and its possible overthrow. Ephemeral organizations and long-term structured organizations, occasional meetings and regular debates, all these expressions can be valuable for the development of a clearer awareness of the challenges today. We do not seek their merging into one large organization, but we encourage communication and collaboration between them, and re-groupment when it makes sense.

"Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." (*Theses on Feuerbach*) Marx's oft-quoted remark did not mean that philosophy was complete and

workers must now simply apply it to change the world. It meant that theory is not an end in itself, that it is pointless if not tied to action that challenges the capitalist world. Theory must be where the struggle is. Therefore, the political organization must aim to participate actively in the struggles of the collective worker. 'Participate' rather than 'intervene': instead of making one-sided interventions, we seek to participate in the conversation of resistance, in which theory inspires and develops action, and is, in its turn, inspired and developed by action.

These struggles may appear as strikes, occupations, and riots. They may be mass mobilizations or they may be small seminal affairs. The questioning of capital and the rejection of its logic are still incipient. Only in the collective struggle, can that questioning lead to a rejection of capital, of the value form, of class society, and its replacement with a new society.

It is to this struggle that IP is committed.

IP On-Line

Internationalist Perspective has announced previously a forthcoming new web site. This process has taken longer than we both anticipated and hoped. We are confident that this process will soon be completed and that a new dynamic, interactive site will be available in the near future.

In the meantime, our old site is still operational at

<http://internationalist-perspective.org>

And we regularly post shorter articles and texts on our blog.

<http://internationalist-perspective.org/blog>

The Economy in the Transition to a “Communist” Society:

Critique of the theses of the GIK and "labor coupons" (Excerpts from an exchange with Kees)

Kees, you write:

"The problem that I see is the following: as we are not in a situation of 'abundance' but in a situation of 'scarcity' there will inevitably be 'exchange' (or else total arbitrariness) based on some kind of calculation. The only possibility would seem to be take labor time as the basis of the calculation."

The link between scarcity and exchange is something that also seems to me to be very important. Exchange and its main instrument, money, are an extremely effective means to ensure the circulation of goods in conditions of scarcity and a developed division of labor, as history has amply demonstrated. Too often we believe that it suffices to declare money "abolished" for it to disappear.

We cannot do away with money without eliminating the necessity for exchange. The Argentine experience of 2001, the "Movement for a social money" shows how, in a situation of scarcity, if the "official" money disappears, other forms of money reappear "spontaneously" as a product of the need to exchange in order to survive. Cigarettes were used as commodity-money during the Second World War by prisoners, and still are today in prisons in the United States. During the 20th century there were many situations, especially in times of war or in statist regimes particularly where governments have tried to ban free exchanges and limit the role of money by imposing mechanisms of rationing. The result has always been that the market and money did not disappear, but developed in their most pernicious form: the black market.

As long as "abundance" or rather a "sufficiency" of goods has not been reached, the tendency to have recourse to commodity exchange and therefore to

money will remain. In the "internal" world of free software, for example, money has practically disappeared not only because of ethical convictions but mainly because of the intrinsic nature of digital goods, freely reproducible, making them "abundant" as soon as they are created.

If money is spontaneously generated by the need for exchange, and if exchange is unavoidable for the distribution of non-abundant goods, or at least some of them, it is likely that, during the "transition" to a communist society, for a longer or shorter period, a form of "money" will subsist, side by side with a non-commodity economy and interwoven with it.

The instinctive and natural repulsion every communist has for money is probably why this reality is so often ignored. Yet from the moment one knows that money and exchange will not disappear in an instant, simultaneously across the globe, their coexistence with the developing non-commodity "communized" sector, would appear inevitable. This coexistence is not essentially a geographical one, but rather one shaped by areas of economic activity. So I certainly agree with the idea of a tendency for the persistence of exchange as (and where) scarcity remains.

That said, two remarks are important:

- In no case, within the sector where the producers have become masters of the productive machinery, can labor power be treated as a commodity. Even assuming that a portion of the share distributed to the individual producer must take a "monetary" form, it must not be determined on the basis of the "value" of labor power.

- Exchange is not the only way to manage scarcity. Rationing, free distribution, based on what is produced can also deal with such a situation, "by avoiding the vicious detour of a calculation based on labor time", in the words of Paul Mattick who made that very point in his critical introduction to the re-publication of the text of the GIK, to which I will come back.

I had written: "No, it does not seem that "exchange" disappears with the system advocated by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*.

You replied: "Correct, but, given [the] context, I obviously spoke not of "exchange" in general terms (such as in an "exchange of letters," but indirect "exchange" via value, in contrast to direct "exchange" by labor time. You do not dispute that for Marx money, exchange (via value) and wage labor will disappear when we directly calculate labor time instead of indirectly via value. But you do not say if you agree here with Marx."

I'm not sure if I understand you: you seem to think that, according to Marx, "exchange" as long as it is not done by using money, is no longer, strictly speaking, "exchange"; as long as the quantity of what is to be exchanged is not measured "via value" but "directly" via "labor time" there is no "exchange" in the strict sense of the term but only in the vague sense, as in the expression an "exchange of letters."

I don't agree with such an interpretation. It is true that the term exchange may have a very general sense that does not involve strict reciprocity, as in the example you give of epistolary exchange. That is why very often, especially in English, I specify "symmetrical exchange" to remove any ambiguity. But when Marx uses this term in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* he does so in the sense of the exchange of equivalents. Whether we measure that value by market mechanisms or by "scientific calculation" (if that is possible, to which I shall return), does not change the fact that what takes place is a symmetrical exchange; an exchange of equivalents. Marx specifies in this text: "*Clearly, the same principle is at work here as that which*

regulates the exchange of commodities as far as this is an exchange of equal values."¹

If indeed in Marx's vision of the "lower phase of communist society" there is no longer wage labor that is not because there is no longer symmetrical exchange, but because that which the producer receives ("the same amount of labor he has given to society in another form") no longer corresponds to the value of his labor power. His labor power is no longer a commodity; it is no longer for sale.

As for money, Marx indeed said that in this phase money disappears. Or rather, he said, among other places, in *Capital* volume II: "There is no reason why the producers should not receive paper tokens permitting them to withdraw an amount corresponding to their labour time from the social consumption stocks. But these tokens are not money; they do not circulate." ²

And in *Capital* volume I, speaking of Owen's labor vouchers, Marx seems to repeat what he wrote: "On this point I will only say that Owen's 'labour money' [voucher], for instance, is no more 'money' than a theatre ticket is." ³ Engels, in *Anti-Dühring*, cites this same reference of Marx.

I have doubts about the fact that such goods do not circulate or would not tend to be used to fulfill monetary functions, especially for the exchange between individuals of "individual consumer items" which, for Marx, remain the "property of the individual".

What calculation?

You say that the exchange, in the "transition period" must be done "on the basis of a calculation" and that "the only possibility appears to be to take labor time as the basis for that calculation."

For the GIK one of the main arguments to justify the need for this calculation is that it creates "an accurate basis for the relationship between

¹ . Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* in Marx, *The First International and After*, Penguin Books, p.346.

² Marx, *Capital*, Volume II, Penguin Books, p.434.

³ Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Penguin Books, p.188

producers and product." *"The relation between social product and producers is defined in an immediate way"* and is no longer dependent on the goodwill of "higher" economic organs, which inevitably transform themselves, as in Russia, into organs of exploitation: "... in every society where the relation between producers and product is not exact, where it is determined by persons, there necessarily arises an apparatus of exploitation, even after the elimination of private property in the means of production."

But the question that arises is whether this "exact" calculation is possible. This calculation requires, firstly, the measurement of the average social labor contained in each product; secondly, the measure of labor time provided by individual producers. Now these two evaluations clash over "qualitative" difficulties.

For the measurement of the labor contained in each product, there is the problem of assessing the contribution of all activities whose outcome does not apply directly to a specific product but contributes to the productive capacity of society in general, especially those related to knowledge, science, social organization, etc.

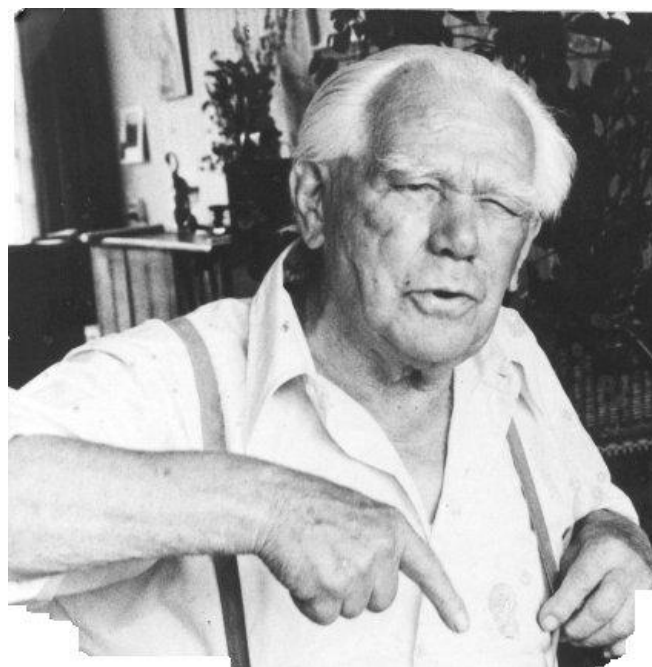
Marx, in the *Grundrisse*, already noted that:

"To the degree that labour time – the mere quantity of labour – is posited by capital as the sole determinant element, to that degree does direct labour and its quantity disappear as the determinant principle of production – of the creation of use values – and is reduced both quantitatively, to a smaller proportion, and qualitatively, as an, of course, indispensable but subordinate moment, compared to general scientific labour, technological application of natural sciences, on one side, and to the general productive force arising from social combination in total production on the other side – a combination which appears as a natural fruit of social labour (although it is a historic product). Capital thus works towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production." ⁴

or :

⁴ *Grundrisse*, Penguin Books, p.700

"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, 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." ⁵



Jan Appel, one of the authors of the GIK text

If the measure of wealth by direct labor time is already a problem in capitalism, why continue on this basis to organize production and distribution with the end of capitalism? With the development of new technologies and the ubiquity of digital software, having become essential at all stages of production, but where the measure of the labor time contained in each utilization is practically impossible, it appears all the more as an absurdity.

At the other end of the exchange, it is necessary to measure the labor done by the individual

⁵ *Ibid*, p.706

producer. For Marx, as for the GIK, this measure must be reduced to that of labor time, regardless of its intensity, regardless of the producer's physical or intellectual qualities. One hour of labor as an engineer gives a right of consumption identical to an hour of labor as a sweeper.⁶

Marx points out the inequalities that the application of such a system entails, not only because it remunerates unequal labor equally, but also because the individual needs of producers are unequal: *"one worker is married, another not ; one has more children than the other, etc"*. He concludes that *"To avoid all these disadvantages, right should not be equal, but unequal. ... [But] these disadvantages are inevitable in the lower phase of communist society."* In this particular aspect, the system described by these lines written more than 130 years ago appears more indifferent to the individual needs of producers than even the capitalism of the twentieth century with its welfare state which foresaw special compensations for the unemployed or large families.

But beyond the questions of compensation for labor, right at the outset there is the question of how to determine what should be considered as "work".

How to distinguish the activity "work" , which alone would give one the right to obtain consumer vouchers, from other activities? Already in capitalism, an ever growing part of the digital goods are no longer produced by "work", in the sense of a separate, paid activity. "Peer production" (Wikipedia, Linux, etc.) are essentially the work of unpaid volunteers, who do it for the fun, and for the pleasure of being useful to others.

The disappearance of "labor" or of the distinction labor – leisure can be seen as one of the parameters making it possible to evaluate the

⁶ The GIK questioned the possibility of rigorously applying this principle from the outset: "Perhaps at the outset it will still be temporarily necessary to pay intellectual labor more; for example, 40 hours of labor would give one the right to a product equivalent to 80 or 120 hours of labor." But it is then pointed out that this must disappear as soon as "things are settled."

progress of overcoming capitalism. To base the distribution of individual consumer goods on the measure of the "work" performed by each person, besides resting on criteria that are difficult to establish, tends to perpetuate a reality which precisely must be overcome as quickly as possible.

On a more general level, measuring the contributions of individual producers is deemed to create (or maintain) a motivation to participate in social production. But as such, this "motivation" is based on the old bourgeois principle: if you don't work, you don't eat; if you don't work enough, you won't have enough, and this independently of the existing social possibilities. Yet to learn how to participate in social production in another way than under the whip of the blackmail of hunger seems an urgent priority as soon as the collectivity will possess the main means of production.

The certainty that people will work, which is deemed to be guaranteed by the obligation to work and by the proportionality between work and the access to products, does not compensate for the negative aspects induced by the spirit of coercion which such a system demands.

Who would have thought 20 years ago that products like Linux or Wikipedia, which represent millions of hours of "work," could be accomplished without any economic coercion? Why would that not be the case for material production? The social atmosphere created by the fact that the means of production are in the hands of society, as a part of the common goods, should generate an enthusiasm and a collective spirit which would be the most powerful motivation to participate in production, without individual economic coercion.

What about the "loafers" who'd refuse to participate freely?

Even in flocks of birds there often are some "loafers" who don't participate like the others in the collective watch for predators, when the group sets down to eat. It doesn't mean the others condemn them to starve. In a society where the means of production are no longer privately owned, the concrete process of production can and must be organized by the producers

themselves. The very concept itself of the means of production (machines, work spaces, etc.) can and must be essentially determined by the gratification they can give to those who use them. To transform productive activity so that it becomes satisfying must be FROM THE VERY BEGINNING be a priority of a post-capitalist transition. To the degree that things depend on human will, we should focus on that method, rather than on individual economic coercion, as an incentive to participate in production.

The system based on the principle "to each according to his labor" therefore seems inappropriate, not only because the calculations it implies seem obsolete and impossible to carry out rigorously, but also because:

- It maintains the principle of symmetrical exchange;
- It maintains the logic of individual economic coercion;
- It maintains the calculation of the parameters of production and distribution on the basis of labor time instead of being based on use values, the concrete physical quanta.

On this last point, it is, again, necessary to take into account the contribution of the new information and communication technologies.

The measure of human needs, on the one hand, and of the actual possibilities of production, on the other, in physical terms (e.g., the quantity of gallons of milk per child, on the one hand, and the number of dairy cows on the other), are far more simple to make than any assessments based on average social labor time.

Estimates of human needs are obviously more complex, since they involve subjective factors. From one point of view, human needs can be considered as infinite. An individual may possibly be convinced that he absolutely needs a rocket for himself in order to walk in space. But we can reasonably hope that in a revolutionary period or a less alienated society, most people can assess their personal material needs taking into account what is possible and in harmony with the collective welfare.

The big department stores and malls increasingly use electronic equipment to register, aside from their accounting in monetary terms (e.g. x thousand dollars from the sale of milk), the physical quantities of the products they sold (e.g. y thousands of milk bottles). This assessment in physical terms is critical to their inventory management, to foresee future orders. Through the networks on the internet this information circulates globally and is transmitted to producers, sometimes in "real time" and automatically, virtually without human intervention.

This measure of the needs and productive possibilities in physical terms today is skewed by the logic of capitalism. Human needs are recognized only to the extent that those needs are 'solvent', expressed by people with the means to pay; production possibilities are taken into account only to the extent they are profitable for capital. But freed from their capitalist matrix, informational links between production and consumption enabled by new technologies are an important asset to quickly dispense with the logic of the commodity.

You write:

"If you don't agree with my critique of the association of Proudhon's 'labor money' with Marx's 'consumer vouchers', what are, in your view, the differences between them?"

Your critique is correct. It would indeed be a mistake to confuse the "distribution coupons" or "labor vouchers" proposed by Marx with Proudhon's "labor money". For Marx these vouchers are not money because they do not circulate. And above all, they do not presuppose the same social conditions of production.

You ask: *"With respect to the two different 'stages' of communism not being opposed to one another, the same question: what are in your view, the differences between the two?"*

In the process described by Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, he distinguishes a "lower phase" and a "higher phase of communist society". In both, the proletariat has possession of the means of production, the old propertied classes have been expropriated, but in the first,

the social and material conditions do not yet permit everyone to take "according to his needs." I share some essential aspects of the description outlined by Marx. But on other aspects, I disagree with interpretations that have often been made; and Marx's text is consistent with them.

I agree with the idea that what characterizes communism in terms of social production and distribution is the universal application of the principle: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs."

I am in agreement with the elements provided by Marx to characterize the higher stage of communism:

*" ... when the enslaving subjugation of individuals to the division of labour, and thereby the antithesis between intellectual and physical labour, have disappeared; when labour is no longer just a means of keeping alive, but has itself become a vital need; when the all-round development of individuals has also increased their productive powers and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly"*⁷

Finally, I also agree with the idea that as long as "all the springs of cooperative wealth" do not

⁷ Marx, Critique of the Gotha Programme, op.cit., p.347. The word labor is used here in a very general sense for the productive activity necessary to social life, and not in the strict sense that it has in societies based on exploitation. The term labor in romance languages [e.g. le travail] comes from the Latin word tripalium, which designated an instrument of torture for slaves in Roman antiquity. At the very least "labor" is inadequate to designate productive activity in an expanding communist society. Nevertheless, the idea that in such a society participation in social production would become "not just a means to live, but also the first need of living" seems to me to be correct and important. When Marx speaks here (as elsewhere) about the "productive forces" he doesn't just mean the material means of production (machines, factories, etc.) as others have too often interpreted his words to mean. For Marx, the principal productive force is human beings with their knowledge, their science, their technologies, and their capacity for productive and social organization. It is in that sense that he sees the development of the productive forces as dependent on the full development of the individual.

"flow more abundantly" it will not be possible to distribute everything in a free and unlimited way.

However, I do not agree with two interpretations or deductions that are made of the picture drawn by Marx.

The first is the one that considers that, before a social revolution has put all the means of production in the hands of producers, no social relationship that is in some way "communist" can arise or exist, not even in embryonic forms. I believe that the relations of production that are developing in the sphere of digital goods, such as the peer production that created free software, Wikipedia, Open Science, etc., are real seeds of communist, non-market relations and that they will be a major asset in building a communist society.

The second interpretation is the one that concludes from the need to develop the productive forces that individual consumption needs must be considered as a secondary concern compared to the development of the means of production, especially industry. Such interpretations served to justify the Stalinist theories of "socialist accumulation" and the horrors of the construction of state capitalism. It's from the beginning, not after a long period of "sacrifices" that production should be directly oriented towards satisfaction of human needs.

Conclusions and alternatives

But recognizing that there are two "phases" in the transition from a capitalist to a communist society means recognizing that, in the first, there is the problem of how to organize production and distribution under conditions where there is not yet sufficient material affluence to allow unlimited free distribution. How then to limit consumption to the existing possibilities of production? If we abandon the wage principle "to each according to the value of his labor power"; and if we reject the principle "to each according to his labor", what principle can we use?

I see only one possibility: to each according to what's socially possible, averaging a "dynamic rationing", i.e. taking into account the evolution of the possibilities in real time. The terms of such a "rationing" of not yet abundant goods remain to

be defined and may vary depending on the product, the geographical framework, and the imagination of the people involved. It is a distribution according to the principle "to each according to his needs/desires", limited, rationed by what is really possible, as in house-hold economies, or as in a fishing village where, after having collectively pulled in the nets, the villagers receive from the catch, taking into account what has been taken and the fact that all those who need have a share.

It is a conscious and direct way to deal with scarcity. It's the logical consequence of the fact that the means of production are owned collectively (placed in the common domain). If we participate in production as collective owners, production can be distributed collectively, always taking into account, in a dynamic way, what is possible and what is necessary. Computer networks make instantaneously available, everywhere, the information required for such a system to be possible. The question then is: will consumers voluntarily respect the restrictions when they exist? Will such a system not collapse due to multiple abuses?

Such a system requires a great degree of collective consciousness and of individual responsibility. This may seem a utopia, seen from the point of view of the capitalist social jungle. But let's not

underestimate the change in attitudes that would be induced by a society where production is oriented directly and exclusively to the human needs, where the orientation of the production is collectively agreed upon. One of the most important contributions of open source and peer production was to prove by facts that humans can co-operate, share and produce the most complex things without the incentive of monetary profit and without state coercion. Some thought that Wikipedia would never develop because it would continuously be destroyed by "vandals". The intelligence of Wikipedia was to trust the collective mind of the participants, to base its rules on the needs of that trust, not on the danger posed by vandals. The vandals have existed since the beginning of Wikipedia, (7%, according to some estimates), but they remain a small minority and the attention of the majority contributed to neutralizing their negative action.

The collective consciousness will be a key element to manage the transition and, again, the new communication technologies will greatly facilitate the establishment of the "collective brain" which such an undertaking requires.

Raoul Victor



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Capitalism is a transient product of history, not its end. It came into being in response to conditions that no longer exist: inevitable scarcity, labor power being the only source of social wealth. Capitalism turned labor power into a commodity to appropriate the difference between its value and the value it creates. For centuries, this hunt for surplus value allowed for a relative harmony between the development of society and capitalist accumulation. Then it gave birth to a new production process, the real domination of capital, in which no longer labor power but the machine stands at the center of production. Science and technology, set in motion and regulated by the collective worker, became the primary source of the creation of social wealth. The giant productivity this unleashed, allowed capitalism to grow both inwards and outwards. It spread over the entire planet and absorbed all spheres of society –including the trade unions and mass parties that arose from the struggle of the working class.

Scarcity was now no longer inevitable, but instead of freeing humanity from want, it condemned capitalism to overproduction. Wealth-creation was no longer dependent on the exploitation of labor power but this plunged capitalism, imprisoned by the law of value, into a crisis of profit. These obstacles to accumulation force capitalism to increase the exploitation of labor and to create room for new expansion through self-destruction, through massive devalorization in depression and war. Capitalism entered its decadent phase when such cannibalistic destruction became part of its accumulation cycle. It is decadent, not because it doesn't grow – it has developed tremendously and profoundly modified the composition of social classes and the conditions in which they struggle in the process -- but because this growth, in its rapacious hunt for profit, became itself destructive. It is decadent, because it is forced to hurl billions into unemployment and poverty because it cannot squeeze profit from them; by the very productivity that could meet all needs. It is decadent, because its need for devalorization impels it to war and unceasing violence. Capitalism cannot be reformed; it cannot be humanized. Fighting within the system is illusory: capitalism must be destroyed.

Capitalism is also decadent because it has generated the conditions for its own replacement by a new society. Science and technology, yoked to the operation of the law of value, and its quantification of the whole of life, are not liberating in themselves. But the working class, who sets it in motion, is by its very condition within capitalism impelled to free itself from the alienation that capitalism, as a social relation, subjects it to, and is, therefore, the bearer of the project of a society freed from the law of value, money, and the division of society into classes.

Such a project has never before existed in history. If the Russian revolution was a proletarian one, it did not result in the emergence of a communist society. The so-called “communism” of the former Eastern bloc, like that of China or Cuba, was nothing other than a manifestation of state capitalism. Indeed, the emergence on an historical scale of a new society can only be realized by the total negation of capitalism, and by the abolition of the laws that regulate the movement of capital. Such a new society entails a profound transformation in the relation of humans to themselves and to each other, of the individual to production, to consumption, and to nature; it entails a *human community* at the service of the expansion and satisfaction of all human needs.