

Philosophers for Change



Sociality, solitude, and the struggle for socialism

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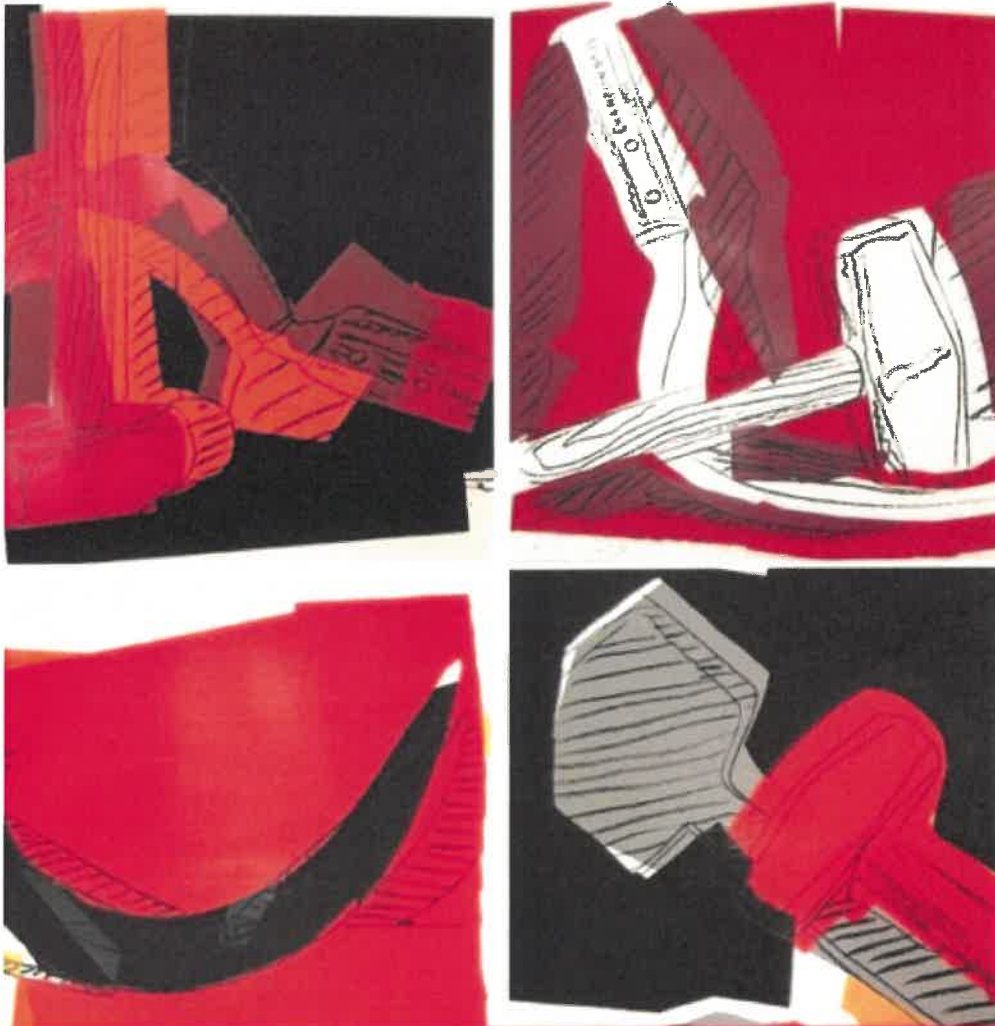
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by Jeff Noonan

The basic principle of historical materialism is that all complex socio-cultural systems and institutions are rooted in and ultimately depend upon reproductive and productive labour. Reproductive and productive labour connect human beings to each other and the sustaining natural environment. “The production of life,” Marx wrote in *The German Ideology*, “both of one’s own in labour and of fresh life in procreation... appears as two-fold relation: on the one hand, as a natural, on the other, as a social relation—social in the sense that it denotes the cooperation of several individuals.”[1] The second principle of historical materialism is that conscious commitment to the cooperative ethos embedded in life-productive and life-reproductive labour has been repeatedly impeded by different concrete forms of social division. While the institutions and legitimating value systems differ, there is a common basis to these social divisions: private and exclusive control over the resources all require in order to survive, develop, and create lives that are valuable and valued. Historical materialism, as a critical and not simply an analytical method, is a form of understanding that aims to contribute to the solution of the problems these social divisions generate for the lives of those forced into dependent labour. Practice depends upon theory just as much as theory depends on practice.

In order to realize its basic practical goal of overcoming private control over universally required resources, historical materialism must draw political and social generalizations from its studies of the past. The problem has been that these generalizations have then tended to be treated as necessarily true for the future, and not just, as the evidence warrants, the past and immediate present. Unfortunately for the truth of these predictions, human history has proven remarkably inventive, within the constraints imposed by biological life-requirements and the social relations needed to satisfy them. Given this inventiveness, the third principle of historical materialism ought to be that concrete political inferences drawn from the study of social and natural life-processes are provisional generalizations only, always refutable by subsequent developments unanticipated in the period when the generalization was first made. While Marx never formulated such a principle explicitly, he was aware of the need for something like it. He warned certain supporters, late in his life, against turning historical materialism into “a historico-philosophical theory whose greatest advantage lies in its being beyond history.”[2] The warning was not heeded.

Instead, supporters typically took ideas like the primacy of the working class to the struggle for socialism and the progressive nature of the development of the forces of production as generalizations that would, in the first case, hold true as long as capitalism lasted, and, in the second, into the socialist era as well. Being a historical materialist has typically been interpreted to mean that one is committed both to an open-ended analysis of the changing pattern of social and cultural life that reproductive and productive labour engender and certain fixed principles concerning class struggle and productive force and scientific development. While this belief has been typical, it does not follow from, is indeed ruled out by, the first and second principles of historical materialism. They do not, and logically cannot, commit one to the future truth of any generalization, because life-processes and the struggles they generate are, by historical materialism’s own account, dynamic and open-ended, and therefore potentially productive of problems and solutions which could not be seen at the time when a given generalization was made.



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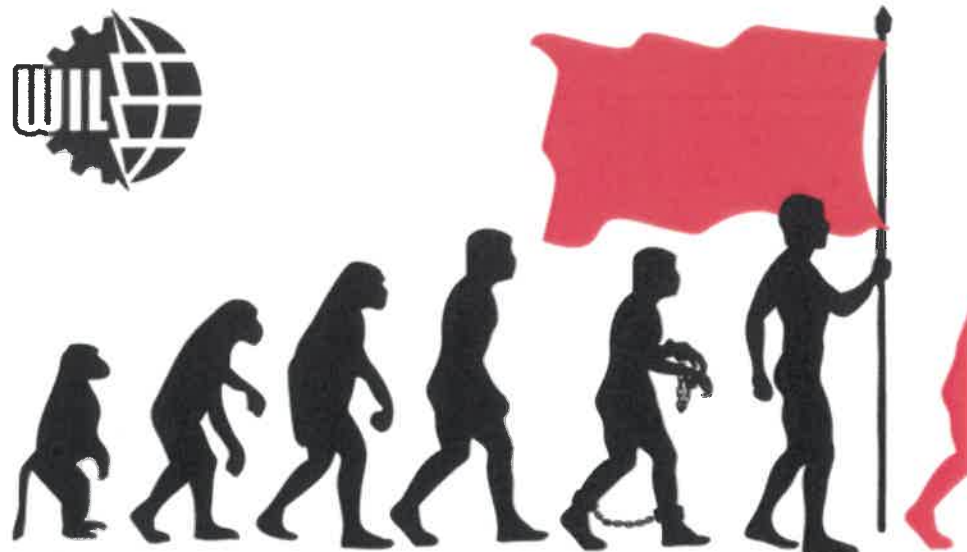
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In this paper I will explore the general theoretical and the immediate practical consequences of my third principle of historical materialism. I will argue that if one takes seriously Marx's claim that history originates in life-productive and life-reproductive labour, then historical materialism is essentially life-grounded. The life-ground of historical materialism entails a reconsideration of at least three core practical claims associated with its usual formulations: the primacy of the working class over other oppressed groups in the struggle for socialism; the necessary connection between the growth of the productive forces and historical progress towards socialism; and the connection between techno-scientific development and the emergence of forms of "rich individuality" which socialism will liberate.

The argument will be developed in three sections. In the first, I will provide a concise re-reading of historical materialism as a life-grounded practical human science of the concrete. In the second, I will

argue that it follows from this re-reading that movements struggling for liberation from the different forms of capitalist oppression, exploitation, and alienation find their common ground not in working class consciousness of its historical mission, but in the systematic barriers they face in accessing the goods, institutions, and relationships valuable and valued lives require. Not only must the structure of socialist movements be reconsidered, the immediate targets of struggle must also be constantly re-evaluated. In contemporary conditions of accelerated capitalist restructuring of social life, preservative struggles (struggle to preserve older forms of solidarity threatened by the forces of contemporary capitalism) take on a new significance. In the third, I will argue amongst all the preservative struggles currently underway, none is more important than the struggle to preserve time and space for the cultivation of rich forms of imaginative interiority. At this point in the development of capitalist technology the intrinsic link Marx saw between scientific development and robust, multifaceted individuality is being severed, and the effects of virtual reality and on-line social networks are in fact tending to erode the interiority that Marx's understanding of 'rich individuality' presupposes. The social conditions in which this general idea of rich individuality could be realized as the form of life for every individual remain valuable as the generic content of socialism, but part of the social conditions must now include, I will argue, space and time apart from others. Having something to say and to give to others requires moments of solitude impossible in on-line life.



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I: Historical Materialism: A Practical Human Science of Concrete-Life Processes

As an explanation of the dynamics of human history, historical materialism focuses the processes by which reproductive and productive labour generate social structures, institutions, and symbolic codes that seek to govern, control, and legitimise that government and control over, the basic life-processes from which they emerge. Labour, productive or reproductive, is, for Marx, the “nature-imposed condition of human life,” but it changes as reflective intelligence responds to novel environmental and social challenges.[3] As an analysis of human history, historical materialism is primarily interested in the processes by which one set of social institutions reaches its limits and gives way to a new set of institutions capable of solving the structural problems the previous social form could not solve. By following the changes in the labour process as its through-line, historical materialism is able to avoid the error of reifying historical dynamics as quasi-natural laws. As a corollary of the principle that social

regularities change as societies change, historical materialism also demonstrates the truth that no particular set of social roles and ruling value system is any more “natural” (i.e., timelessly legitimate) than any other.

At the same time, historical materialism also provides grounds to support the claim that while moralities and social roles are not naturally fixed, there are objective grounds for distinguishing between better and worse forms of social organization. Whatever the particularities of a given social form, underlying it, but generally hidden, is a general life-interest that the institutions must serve. No social form can survive the fundamental breakdown of its systems of productive and reproductive labour or the natural systems in which they are grounded. In other words, all social life depends upon the natural environment and the social structures that mediate the productive and reproductive labour in and on that environment. Whatever else a society produces, it must produce life-goods and it must preserve the life-capital out of which those goods are regularly produced. Life-capital is, as McMurtry argues, “the life base of the common interest—that without which humanity’s life-capacities degrade and die. It is the bridging concept across the economy-environment division as well as across present and future generations... the true meaning of economic necessity and the sole substances of growth and development.” [4]

Life-capital and life-goods—that which supports and enables life in all eras and grows in all conditions of genuine social progress—are what Marx’s argument that history emerges out of forms of life-engendering labour requires to be complete, but neither he nor subsequent Marxists have spelled it out consistently. Marx’s conception of capital remains one-sided—value that produces more value, whereas the life-ground of historical materialism points to the deeper idea of life-capital—life that produces more life as the real foundation of human life, and all that may rationally be called good in it. That Marx and subsequent Marxists have failed to see this life-ground does not mean that it was not there all along. Now that environmental breakdown, non-Marxist political struggles against capitalist life-destructiveness, and decades of philosophical labour have brought it to light, contemporary historical materialist critique of capitalism can overcome the limitations of its nineteenth century origins without losing its grip on productive and reproductive labour as the fundamental driving force of historical change.



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If all social institutions ultimately seek to reproduce themselves, then they must enable the production and reproduction of at least as much social labour as is necessary to maintain the society. The people who undertake the productive and reproductive labour that sustains society are not, no matter how they might be treated by the ruling class, mere tools, but socially self-conscious centres of activity and potential enjoyment. They are capable of fighting back against life-destructive and unsatisfying forms of exploitation and oppression. Along with creative response to environmental challenges, historical materialism must count social struggle as a force of change. Historical materialism is thus not only an objective analysis of social change, it is a practical human science of the concrete which intervenes in history on behalf of the majorities in every age who do most of the reproductive and productive labour, but are dominated by the ruling class standing Oz-like behind the curtains of political power and the justifications for it thrown up by the ruling value system of society. The analytical and critical and the objective and subjective are not two independent parts of historical materialism, they are internally integrated with each other. The essential analytical finding of historical materialism is that “human beings make their own history.” It follows from this fact that they can always change “the circumstances not of their own choosing” which each new generation confronts as a given set of facts.[5]

Yet, it does not follow from the collective capacity to change society that any particular set of social changes is necessarily better than the forms of life it changes. That a revolutionary intervention into the established order of things is possible does not mean that it is legitimate, or that human life, collectively and individually, necessarily improves as a result. Marx sought to legitimate revolution on the basis of a theory of social crisis that maintained that social forms reach a point beyond which they can no longer fulfill even basic life-support functions—they objectively break down, which in effect forces the majority—who always suffer first and most in any crisis—to intervene and resolve the crisis through fundamental social change.[6] Marx conceived the revolutionary process as class struggle, and historical change as changes in the ruling class, which, after its victory, re-orders social institutions to consolidate its rule and establish its social interests as supreme.[7] The final revolution would be a revolution of the proletariat which, as the social power which performs all productive (but not all reproductive) labour,

has no need to exploit anyone else. Once it has overcome the bourgeoisie which exploits and alienates its labour, the basic contradiction of human history – that some live on the productive labour of others without productive contribution of their own, (or, in life-value terms, that some appropriate life-capital without contributing back to it) – has been resolved. Overthrowing the bourgeoisie and removing the fetters on the forces of production is, for Marx and most subsequent Marxists, the necessary conditions for the construction of “that economic formation... which with the highest upswing of productive forces of social work assures mankind its most universal development.”[8]



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One can once again see the implicit life-ground of historical materialism appear in Marx’s theory of crisis. Revolutions are made possible by breakdowns in the system of productive and reproductive labour, upon which human life ultimately depends. Yet, in its concrete explication, Marx’s theory of revolution focuses only on the effects of crisis on the political agency and consciousness of the working class. In its subsequent “orthodox” developments, culminating in the Stalinist and Maoist disasters, historical materialism insisted upon the primacy of the development of the productive forces to the success of the socialist project. Socialism itself tended to be understood not in terms of non-alienated labour as well as non-alienated forms of mutualistic relationships and life-experience and activity across all dimensions of human life-capacity, but higher levels of consumption and parochial, stifling forms of community.

The great multitude of dissident Marxisms, with the exceptions of certain feminist and eco-centric variants, (Saleh, Kovel, Foster) also lost sight of the originating but implicit life-ground in favour of idealist doctrines of the socio-historical construction of everything, including human needs.[9] The later path can be traced to Lukacs’ *History and Class Consciousness*, in which even nature is taken to be a

historical product.[10] What both orthodox and Western Marxist variants shared was the idea that socialism had to come about through revolution which swept away all 'bourgeois' forms of social life, social relationship, and individual identity. The idea that preservation of older elements of social life, relationships, and identity as a life-capital inheritance from past ages of labour, preserved in civil commons institutions and older forms of relationship, narrative, memory, and traditional life-practice generally could become of central importance to the struggle against capitalism is anathema to almost all interpretations of historical materialism.



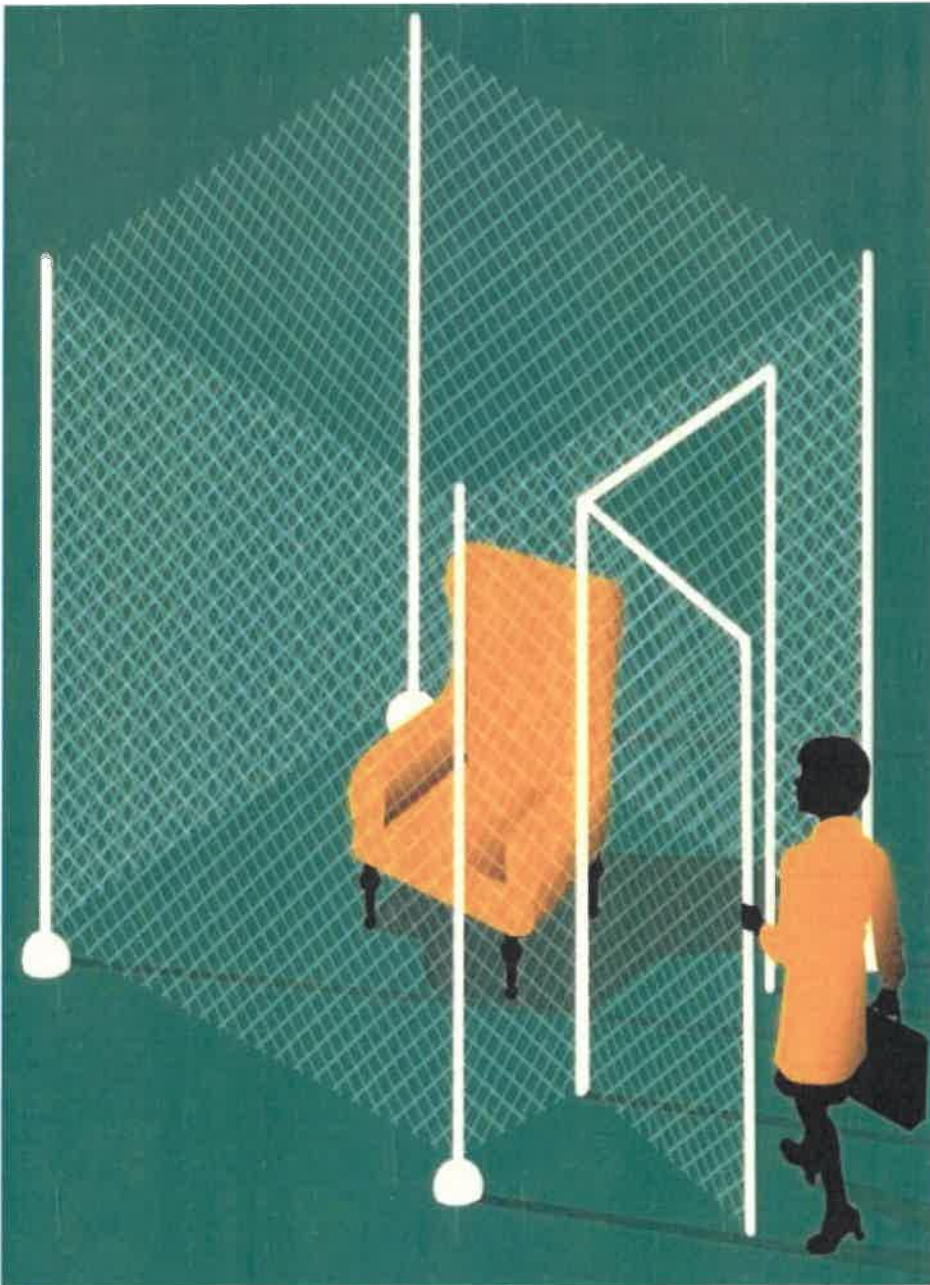
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II: The Life-Ground of Multidimensional Social Struggles and the Future Value of the Past

As I noted in the introduction, historical materialism risks contradicting its two fundamental methodological principles, as well as its deeper implicit life-ground, if it believes that general structural features of capitalism ensure the future truth of contextual political generalizations. Today, three such generalizations have been called into question: (1) that the working class must always be the leader of the struggle for socialism; (2) that growth of the productive forces and techno-scientific development are always progressive; and (3) that the struggle for socialism is a struggle for a society rooted in a completely new set of institutions and values. I will work through each of these claims in turn.

David Camfield has recently (and rightly) argued that historical materialism has not ever really “grasped the extent to which contemporary societies... have been socially organized both extensively and intensively by social relations other than class—those of gender, race, and sexuality—as well as by class. These social relations are not epiphenomena. Where they exist... social reality is constituted by them at the same time as it is constituted by class [and they must not] be treated as ‘add-ons.’” [11] However, if the experience of social reality is not only formed by one’s class position, but by one’s gender and sexual and racial identity, then it follows that class, from the perspective of those other identity-formations, is one element of identity amongst many. If historical materialism continues to justify a path of historical change which identifies the proletariat as the embodiment of universal human interests, then it follows straightforwardly that the other identities are being treated as add-ons, important only for the way in which they modify a working class consciousness that remains foundational for the project.

In order to solve this problem, historical materialism requires the distinct understanding of universal interests and a different conception of the content and political means for achieving “the most universal development of humanity” that materialist ethics can provide. If racial and sexual and gender oppression are not to be treated as mere add-ons to class, then all must be understood as concrete forms of identity that shape human lives. Human beings are social self-conscious centres of experience and activity, whose immediate life-horizons are shaped by their actual social identity. Their actual social identity is always a complex of sex, gender, race, ethnic, age, and class factors. These factors are both given (because given ruling value systems assign meanings to these markers of identity) and alterable (because given ruling value systems can be changed through changed forms of action and interaction). That which motivates struggles for change is the experience of being limited in one’s range of experience and activity by one’s social position and identity, but underlying the struggle as its ultimate justification is a universal human life-interest in securing comprehensive access to those resources, institutions, and forms of relationship that free life-capacity development requires. These life-requirements are shared across all different concrete identities, although the experience of being deprived of that which will satisfy them (as well as the specific means of satisfying them) varies with the identity concerned. Class exploitation, alienation, and the variety of oppressive hierarchies operative in a society at any given time find their unifying ground in the principle that all are systematic ways of depriving, and justifying the deprivation of, one or more natural-biological, social-cultural, or temporal conditions of living and leading a valuable and valued life.[12]



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To be a woman, for example, in a patriarchal society is to have one's ability to satisfy one's life requirements impeded by false assumptions about "women's nature," impediments which may be intensified relative to one's racial identity, sexuality, age, and class position. What matters politically most of all is not one marker of identity as opposed to another, but rather the concrete experience of facing specific additional burdens in the struggle to satisfy one's life-requirement and the realization of one's life-capacities because of one's position in the social hierarchy constructed by the ruling value system. For all oppressed, exploited, and alienated people the goal of struggle is the same—comprehensive, universal access to the means of life-support, development, and enjoyment—but articulated through different concrete histories, anchored in different concrete experiences of the structurally identical barriers.

If that is true, then it follows that all alienated, exploited, and oppressed groups have the same political life-interest: eliminate those social institutions, and the false ideas that justify them, that impede the universal and comprehensive satisfaction of the shared life-interests of each and all, in those forms that

are adequate to the concrete identities that shape the experience of oneself and social life. Achieving this goal by whatever political means genuinely advance it—means which will necessarily differ depending upon the particular levels of social development of the society in which groups find themselves—is the general condition for that sort of “universal development” that Marx associated with socialism. Given the universal threats to universal development today—environmental crisis, economic crisis, the steady erosion of democracy, the persistence of archaic forms of oppressive hierarchy, the generalized nihilism of the ruling money-value system—there is no longer any historical ground for maintaining that the working class alone embodies the universal human life-interests. The embodiment of the universal human life-interest is the species in the concrete universality of its different identities, and anyone who recognizes the threats and undertakes to address their causes in a way that frees resources from life-destructive uses for the sake of adding to our life-capital stores is a proponent of the conditions of “universal development,” whatever their actual identity and whatever they happen to call themselves. The social conditions that enable the “most universal development” of human life must be constantly re-evaluated in light of what actual histories of struggle teach, not only about what works and what does not at the level of social organization, but what is more or less valuable and valued in human life by people who take the time to reflect upon what their societies offer, and what they actually require.

It is in this light that the generalization concerning the necessarily progressive nature of productive force and techno-scientific development must be considered. Capitalist social dynamics not only prevent the emergence of life-valuable forms of expressing and enjoying cognitive, imaginative, and practical-creative capacities, they also constantly threaten the life time and space that past struggles and older forms of human sociality and experience have carved out and protect from absorption into capitalist markets. This claim is true in traditional societies not yet fully incorporated into capitalist money-value circuits, but it is also true in the most technologically developed social spaces. However, in the later spaces there are new forms of threat to older solidarities and forms of experience and interaction. Beyond security of access to the most basic life-requirement satisfiers, the most important of the general conditions for the free development of our life-capacities is the experience of time as free, as an open matrix of possibilities for life-valuable action, experience, and relationship.[13]



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Marx was the first to systematically understand the role of free time, but what he did not understand was that the high degree of labour productivity that capitalist techno-science made possible and which was responsible for what he regarded as free time (time outside of necessary labour), could itself become, past a certain point of development, the primary threat to individuals being able to experience that time as free. Marx believed that capitalist competition drove techno-scientific progress, which in turn drove labour productivity, which in turn created surplus time, which would be appropriated as free time in a socialist society.[14] Free time would be realized “in the development of the rich individuality, which is as varied in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour no longer appears as labour, but as the full development of activity itself in which natural necessity has disappeared in its immediate form, because natural need has been replaced by historically produced need.”[15] From his vantage point on the nineteenth century, focussing on a working class still living in

conditions of monstrous deprivation, Marx could see no contradiction, and no possible contradiction, between the given structure of historically produced needs and “the rich individuality.” At this point in techno-scientific and social development, I believe, such a contradiction has opened up. The forms of social interaction which new communications technologies are making possible do permit the extension and deepening of social connection across the globe and new forms of play and virtual labour, and in that sense they add new content to the meaning of “rich individuality.” On the other hand, social networks and virtual life generally are altering our understanding of what social relationships mean, as well as the relationship between the imagination and its material realizations in ways which, I will argue, work against the subjective conditions for the development of the “rich individual.”

This result is perhaps doubly ironic: first, because the defenders of networked society justify it precisely on the grounds that Marx invokes here: it promotes a “multi-sided production and consumption” and second, because it depends upon recapturing the free time opened up by the more productive labour which Marx regarded as the temporal substance for socialist society. In recapturing the potential free time opened up by highly productive labour, networked capitalism has simultaneously intensified the experience of time as a coercive external force and threatened the forms of interiority “rich individuality” requires. I will return to this point in Section Three below.

Before turning to a more nuanced discussion of the problems of virtual social networks the third problematic generalization must be examined. Valuable and valued lives certainly require a variety of life-serving, non-alienated forms of labour. However, since human life is a unity of sentient, cognitive, imaginative, and practical-creative capacities, its valuable and valued forms require more than opportunities to work in non-alienated, worker-governed ways. Good human lives involve the full and free development of our capacities for non-exploitative and non-appropriative relationships—with the natural world generally (as an intrinsically valuable field of living and non-living things and forces), with other people, and with our own inner life as field of imaginative play and projection. The latter is especially important as a condition of our becoming uniquely individuated contributors to the health and vitality of the natural and social worlds we share. These non-exploitative and non-appropriative relationships are threatened by the generally exploitative, instrumentalizing, and alienating forms of action and interaction typical of capitalist society. At the same time, not every form of relationship or every experience in capitalist society is alienated, oppressive, or exploitative. Alongside the deformations and deprivations of capitalism one finds forms of action and interaction which are satisfying, mutually affirmative, and life-building—elements of a socialist value system and modes of interaction existing within and alongside of alienating capitalist relationships. Friendships, relationships, moments of beauty snatched from the dreary tedium of social routine, and institutions which develop out of solidaristic commitment to one another are also elements of capitalist society, but whose sources are not reducible to the capitalist social forms in which they continue to exist.

THE PROLETARIAT OVERCOMING IDEOLOGICAL DOMINATION



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In conditions of highly developed productive forces, in which human beings are now found increasingly as nodes in virtual social networks, a seeming political paradox emerges: progressive demands must include conservative—or perhaps better said, preservative—elements. The claim, however, is only apparently paradoxical. As Andrew Collier has demonstrated in an essay of superb originality, Marx's own understanding of political struggle was not determined by abstract ideals whose realization depended upon the complete destruction of existing social forms (what he calls the Noah complex) but by an organic conception of struggle driven by people trying to solve the immediate and concrete problems they face. He argues that "capitalist society is not just the capitalist economy. The institutions of capitalist society which generate values in their participants include families and circles of friends, trade unions and cooperative societies, churches and mosques, allotment associations and babysitting circles and so on, and these generate values of mutual help and solidarity and another non-commercial values." [16] It is demonstrably the case that the values of mutual help, solidarity, and relationship for the sake of the pleasures of human relationship are all threatened by the current dynamics of the capitalist economy.

These are threatened externally, by attacks on solidaristic associations that have evolved to fight against or mitigate the rule of money-value over all facets of life, and internally, by the loss of interiority and material interaction to networks of virtual sociality advanced capitalist society is making increasingly compulsory. If these claims are true it suggests that the problem with highly developed capitalism is not

that its relations of production are impeding the development of the forces of production, but that the run-away growth of the forces of production and their embodiment in networked cybernetic systems is destroying the social and interior foundations for valuable and valued lives. If this claim is true, then the “radical needs” that Marcuse felt underlay demands for revolution are not exclusively needs for a future different from the present in all respects, but for a future that in some essential respects preserves or recovers forms of slow, material interactions between unnetworked selves.[17]

Some, like Giuseppe Tassone might object that to affirm the value of preservative struggles is to abandon the boldness of vision and radicality required to overcome capitalism in favour of merely “ethical denunciation.”[18] In response it must be said that ethical denunciation is an essential moment of historical materialist criticism. If the critique of capitalism is not a critique of the way in which it impedes the possibility of people leading good lives, then it is merely technocratic critique of economic functions that holds no interest to most people. On the other hand, to the extent that the faith that Tassone places in the possibility of “historical leaps” beyond what seems objectively possible in a given moment is not ahistorical wishful thinking, it is fully compatible with the sort of preservative struggle I am describing here. It is true that preservation in the face of relentless pressure to serve capitalist commodity markets also requires transformative struggles against those forces, but that is no reason to not preserve older, life-valuable forms of non-alienated social relationships where they exist.

Indeed, a society that protects some time outside of and apart from virtual networks has become, I will now argue, an essential condition of the emergence of Marx’s “rich individual.” In order to become a person with ideas and stories and talents worth sharing with others, one requires time and space for oneself. Socialism, or the form of rich individuality that Marx looked to socialism to enable, requires, I believe, the preservation of the possibility of moments of solitude.



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III: The Networked Self and Interior Conditions of Rich Individuality

Progressive social struggles protect or reclaim life time and space from the alienating and exploitative structures of capitalist labour markets and the invidious hierarchies that characterise all forms of oppression. Within life time and space thus protected and reclaimed, people are able to access the natural and social resources and forge the sort of mutualistic relationships valuable and valued lives require. The more successful histories of struggle have been, the more life time and space has been reclaimed and protected from alienating, exploiting, and oppressing forces, the more important preservative struggles become. These preservative struggles attain more importance because the more life time and space that has been reclaimed and protected from alienating, exploiting, and oppressing forces, the more human lives become the intrinsically valuable creation of the life-bearers (as opposed to the instrumentally valuable object of social and economic power). Social struggle may thus be understood as a complex interweaving of battles over the control of life time and space, for whomever controls the time and space within which life is led controls life itself.

Battles over life time and space are not always obvious or overt. In fact, the most successful strategy for the capitalist re-colonization of life time and space would be a strategy that its victims not only do not recognise as alienating and oppressive, but rather appears to them as their own work. One might call the realization of such a strategy, (adapting a turn of phrase from Marcuse), "repressive de-alienation." [19] Marx argued that human beings living in a society that had overcome capitalist contradictions would "contemplate themselves in a world they have created." [20] The virtual lives and relationships that people create for themselves on-line appear to them as worlds they have created. I suggest, nevertheless,

that this de-alienation is repressive, in these two respects: hiding behind the apparently free virtual life time and space is the coercive material power of capitalist market forces, and the forms of individuality encouraged by virtual reality lack the depth interiority substantively valued and valuable forms of individuality require.

Marx looked to techno-scientific development as the fundamental material condition of liberating human life activity from its instrumental domination under capitalism. Techno-science would produce such abundance that necessary labour time would shrink. A class conscious proletariat, seeing the abundance denied it, would organize so as to realize the potential for multifaceted self-creation that capitalism created but could not fulfill. Amongst the many checks on this road to freedom that Marx could not foresee is perhaps the most damning of all: that techno-scientific development could reach a point where it could simultaneously liberate life time and space from and re-capture it for determination by capitalist market forces. That is not to deny that the experience of the reduction of socially average labour time is uneven. It is true, as Massimiliano Tomba points out, that “different temporalities are tied to each other, marking the rhythm of global production. Individual productive arrangements can exploit labour which has higher or lower productivity than that of [globally] socially average labour, which remains, however, the temporality that determines the pace.”[21] The global economy combines radically different actual labour times, with some workers still working in conditions which resemble the early nineteenth century while others enjoy flexible workdays and weeks or at least time outside of paid labour and access to communication networks sufficient to the invention of a virtual identity and life. It is the later form of life that interests me here, because the actuality of such lives demonstrates the possibility of repressive de-alienation, and the possibility of repressive de-alienation emphasises the importance, in conditions of highly developed cyberspace networks, of solitude and material, rather than virtual, connectivity.



* BRINGING YOU BIGGER and BETTER CANNIBALS!
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Virtual life is, in some essential respects if not all, repressively de-alienating because it does not actually overcome, but is structured by, and in fact extends the hold of, coercive capitalist social forces over, the individuals who feel liberated in their on-line life. Capitalist society replicates itself by growing, and in order to grow it must dominate ever more life time and space. Any moment of life time or space

withdrawn from capitalist cycles of work and consuming is, from the standpoint of capitalist labour and consumer markets, wasted. The never ceasing demands to be connected cause a “contraction of the present” in which the self is subject to “increased time pressure, under which one attempts... individually as well as institutionally, to culturally digest the compressed assault of innovation.”[22] The demands exceed the limits of physical possibility. Networked life has made possible and operates according to a global space time in which there is no natural night or day and in which one can always be working, or buying, or both. It is arrayed against all natural limits to production and consumption, including one of the most basic biological necessities of all, the need for sleep. “The large portion of our lives that we spend asleep,” Jonathan Crary argues “freed from a morass of simulated needs, subsists as one of the great affronts to the voraciousness of contemporary capitalism. Sleep is the uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by contemporary capitalism.”[23] Networked life does not of course abolish the need for sleep, but it seeks to abolish the desire for sleep by generating the anxiety that one will miss out on something because somewhere someone is uploading some content that one might want to access.[24]

Yet, even as people are led into a war against their own most basic natural life-requirements, they do not feel dominated. Quite the contrary, it is often in on-line life that people feel most in control of their lives, because their on-line identities have a plasticity and playfulness that is often not possible in material social life. While I do not deny the life-value of the playfulness and possibilities for manifold interactions between people who would never otherwise meet, it remains the case that networked life is not completely formless. It is rather shaped by the same forces that shape the material world of labour and commodity markets, and which continue to operate on the virtual self, whether the virtual self is fully conscious of their operation or not. Crary again makes this point well: “The only consistent factor connecting the otherwise desultory succession of consumer products and services is the intensifying integration of one’s time and activity into the parameters of electronic exchange. Billions of dollars are spent each year researching how to reduce decision making time, how to eliminate the useless time of reflection and contemplation.”[25]

While people feel emancipated from the material forces that cause alienation in material social life, they are in fact being worked upon by those same social forces. More and more of the non-incorporated interior spaces of imagination and reflection are taken over and integrated into only those structures of demand which the established society and value system are competent to satisfy. Marcuse’s postulation of the need for a radically different social order as a condition of rebellion against the established order has neither the time nor the space to develop in such an environment, since it appears that everything desirable is already virtually available.

**Get a job. Go to work. Get married.
Have children. Follow fashion.
Act normal. Walk on the pavement.
Watch TV. Obey the law.
Save for your old age**



<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/matslave2.jpg>

In order to reproduce itself with as little conflict as possible, society must ensure the internalization of its ruling value system. People are not blank slates, but they are also not born with allegiances to any definite social structure and set of political values. They are born with life-requirements that other people must help fulfill and capacities for imagination which underlie their ability to project satisfying futures for themselves. From the standpoint of the imagination—which, as Bachelard reminds us, “faces the future ... as a function of unreality,” which is nevertheless positive in nature.”[26]—the future is that which is not yet but which can be created in reality. The positive function of unreality is to negate the hold of the present and past on our thinking and thus to enable us to foresee and create that which is not yet but could be. To internalise a ruling value system is to import an external limitation on what it is possible to imagine, or to imagine things only in such a way that their material realization does not matter. Once one starts thinking not in terms of what it is possible to imagine oneself becoming but what it is realistic to imagine oneself doing, or—what amounts to the same thing in practical terms—to imagine that one has created something in material reality just because one has introduced content into a network—the liberatory potential of interiority has been compromised. The web seems opposed to this reduction of the possible to the realistic because it appears to be an absolutely open space in which everything is permitted, and the virtual self an emancipated personality.

In fact, Crary argues, networked activity on the web is at least as much about self-monitoring as it is self-expression: “the rhythms of technological consumption are inseparable from the requirements of constant self-administration...The privatization and compartmentalization of life are able to sustain the illusion that one can ‘outwit the system’ and devise a superior system, [but]... in reality there is an

imposed an inescapable uniformity to our compulsory labour of self-management.”[27] Even if one could, for a moment, ‘outwit the system,’ the tracking of the eccentric behaviour would be incorporated into the predictive algorithms used by marketers and search engines. Evading incorporation would only enhance the capacity of the economic giants that control the web to incorporate others.

This capacity for self-correction and normalization of the eccentric is the real ideological genius of networked life. It takes two opposed forces—imagination and ruling value system—and makes them disappear into each other. Cyberspace appears to be the ever-unfolding, ever changing objectification of networked imaginations given unrestrained play. On-line, the most staid and banal forms of capitalist life, business and commerce, that which one might expect unconstrained imaginations to reject as suffocatingly conformist, take on the appearance of rebellious iconoclasm but without, alas, ceasing to be business and commerce. “Web culture is the final step,” Lee Siegel argues, “in the long, slow assimilation of subversive values to conventional society. With the advent of the Internet, business culture has now strangely become identified with unlimited mental and spiritual freedom—a freedom once defined by its independence from the commercial realm.”[28] The assimilation of oppositional values by the ruling value system proves once again the powerfully adaptive nature of capitalist society. Assimilation of oppositional values is not, of course, the same as their realization.

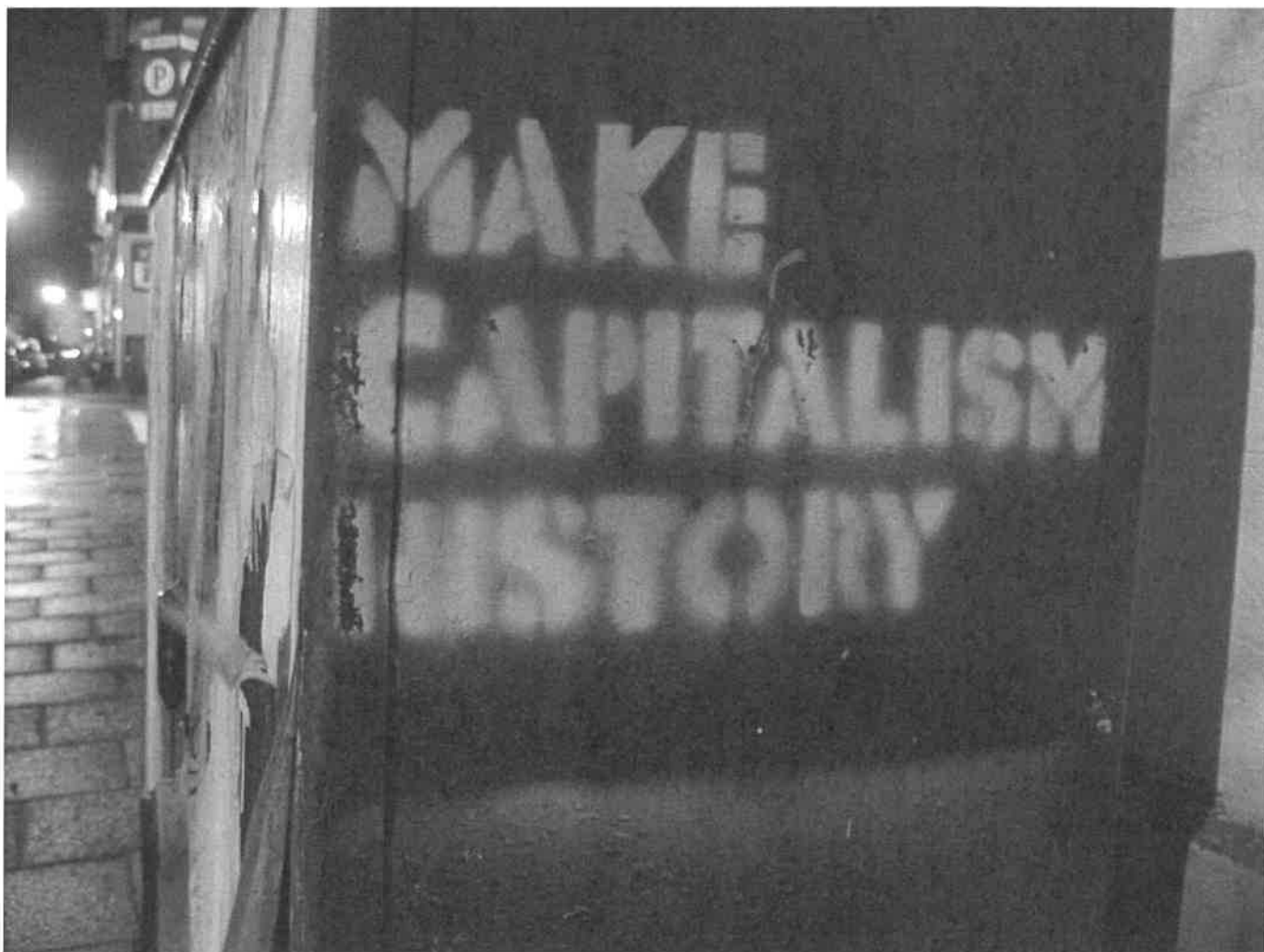


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In order to understand oppression, alienation, and exploitation, people must feel as though their goals are being impeded by the external social forces. In order to feel one’s goals impeded by external social forces, one must be able to form goals and desire forms of relationship which the given ruling value system cannot realize. If one formulates only such goals and desires only such relationships as are allowed under a given structure of power, then one’s goals and desires will never become a source of political conflict. If the given society permits the realization of all goals and allows the formation of all relationships that are valuable for the self and valued by others, and these goals and relationships give rise to patterns of social action and resource use which are not only sustainable over the open ended future of human existence, but contribute back to the life-sustaining social world forms of labour and interaction which enable others to do the same, then the problems of alienation, exploitation, and oppression would be resolved. But if a ruling value system allows the emergence of a virtual space in

which it appears that anything is possible but in reality is monitoring every key stroke for economic and political data that can be used to ensure its own better reproduction, then the radical political implications of the imagination—the capacity to invent interior worlds in comparison with which external worlds can be found wanting—has been incorporated into the reproductive dynamics of the given structure of rule.

When the imagination becomes an object to be mined for the information it can yield about how better to reproduce an alienating, exploiting, and oppressing system, it must become, at the same time, an object of the sorts of preservative political struggles I discussed at the beginning of this section. My argument is not, of course, that cyberspace or virtual networks should be abolished, but rather that people must be wary of identifying their imaginations with their objectifications in virtual life—that something inner be preserved as a space of pure creation. In order to preserve the imagination as a space of pure creation, the individual requires separation and solitude just as much as she requires connection and interaction. As the psychoanalyst Anthony Storr argues, “man is so constituted that he possess an inner world of imagination which is different from, though connected to, the world of external reality. It is the discrepancy between the two worlds which motivates creative imagination. People who realize their creative potential are constantly bridging the gap between inner and outer.”[29]



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In order for there to be real creativity, then, there must be both inner and outer, and any force which threatens to collapse the one into the other is a threat to creative self-realization. As Goethe asked, “Why now disturb my quiet elation?/Leave me with my wine alone/with others we seek education/But

inspiration on one's own." [30] The affirmation of the values of solitude, inspiration, and the distinction between interior and exterior become political when we re-examine them in light of the pervasive alienation of labour in capitalist society.

For most people who work, labour-activity is mindless, deadening, boring, uncreative, performed under the direction of a boss and only in response to an underlying economic and natural necessity. It was against this suffocating alienation of humanity's world-creating capacity that Marx rebelled. Marx's deepest and abiding value, that which he believed capitalism most of all violated, was the value of substantive individuality, i.e., of each person as a potentially unique creator and contributor to the collective whole which sustains each and all: "Assume man to be man and his relation to the world to be a human one. Then you can exchange only love for love, trust for trust, etc. If you want to enjoy art, you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you want to exercise influence over other people, you must be a person with a stimulating and encouraging effect on other people. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a specific expression, corresponding to the object of your will, of your real individual life." [31] The development of this real individual life has both external and internal conditions.

Externally, it requires regular and secure access to the basic means of biological life as well as the institutions and relationships through which our human capacities for articulate thought and creative activity develop. Notwithstanding the ubiquity of cybernetic networks, these external conditions are, and remain, material. As Sherry Turkle reminds us, in warning of the one-dimensionality of on-line "communities," the original meaning of community was "to give amongst each other." [32] That we must first give amongst each other as material bodies does not, of course, rule out our being able to be given amongst each other as networked selves. What it does serve to remind us of, though, is that material limitations can have contradictory relationships to our goals. On the one hand, material limitations such as are imposed on some groups of people by ruling groups so as to ensure the continued subordination of the deprived are oppressive. But the material limitations imposed on our goals by the general need to ensure that nature retains its life-support capacity, or other people as unique centres of consciousness, experience, and action with their own goals and ideas, are limitations that turn us inward in a life-valuable way. They are those limitations confrontation with which deepens our inner life, by making us realise that not everything we can imagine can be externalized, and that of the things we can externalize, the forms of externalization, in order to be life-serving contributions, must not undermine the life-support capacity of nature or other peoples' projects and goals.

Hence, the internal conditions of rich individuality require the opposite of that which the external conditions demand. The satisfaction of our life-requirements is all about maintaining connection to other people and life-support systems. Converting the satisfaction of those life-requirements into life-valuable expressions of our capacities requires time apart from others, a deceleration of time, and deliberately imposed constraints on the object of consciousness. All three demands are at odds with the experience of time and content on-line. As David R. Loy argues, "the cyberpresent results from slicing time so thinly that sense of duration disappears, replaced by accelerating speed. Our awareness usually hops from one perch to the other, but now it hops so quickly that the sensation is more like running on an accelerating treadmill. This is possible, however, only because now-moments—our treadmill steps—are denuded of meaningful content." [33] The rich individuality Marx spoke about, although many-sided, does not try to pay attention to everything and does not create itself by externalizing everything that happens to come to mind.



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Marx argues, in the passage from the “Manuscripts” cited above, that real individuals are determinate and limited; they are not capable of everything but must work on themselves to develop the knowledge and form the relationships they desire. Self-creation is not giving voice to every fleeting thought and puerile feeling; it is self-limitation of the most demanding sort; ascesis, giving oneself over to the discipline that commands one’s attention. As Goethe writes of artistic creation: “so too all forming culture needs some tether:/Unbridled spirits end in vain disaster/Pursuing pure perfections elevation./Who wants great things must get himself together/Constraint is where you show yourself the master,/And only law is freedom’s sure foundation.”[34] Not everyone will become an artist of Goethe’s calibre, but of course, that is not the point. Everyone has something to give to the commonwealth of life-capital from which rich individuals must draw. While time and space and solitude might appear like oppressive limitations from the perspective of the on-line restless spirit, contributions worth sharing amongst each other, of whatever form they might take, require them as conditions of their value.

It does not follow from this argument that virtual life should be abolished, any more than it follows from the argument that labour should be abolished because capitalist labour is alienating. What it does

do is remind that meaningful creation—the sort that socialism seeks to enable—requires not only inspiration, but the discipline to hold back, to not share everything but only that which is actually valuable and valued by others as real contributions to their own lives as sensing, thinking, and acting beings. Yet, this holding back cannot be merely the act of isolated people, and there must be time and space for them to draw back into. Hence the importance of the preservative struggles that I discussed in Section Two returns. In the context of highly developed capitalist society that which must be preserved is not only air and water and healthy food, forms of solidarity represented by trade unions and cultural groups and social movements, but also life time and space in which people can be alone to think about their real situation, experience themselves both as the object of social forces and as a subject capable of reacting against them, and to imagine different ways of relating, acting, living, and organizing public life.

That these preservative struggles can never attain their goal without transformative struggles goes without saying, for the capitalist search for life space and time to instrumentalize is endless. Nevertheless, that transformative struggles are necessary conditions of preserving that which deserves to be protected does not mean that the preservative moment is not also essential, and even more so in conditions in which transformative struggles are absent. The deep life-ground of historical materialism connects them all and demands not dogmatic adherence to the organizational generalizations of the past but creative openness to the challenges of the future, including the importance of ensuring that older forms of life-valuable sociality and solitude are preserved for the subsequent generations who will need them.



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End notes:

[1] Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1975, pp. 48-9.

[2] Karl Marx, "Letter to the St. Petersburg Journal *Homeland Notes*," *The Letters of Karl Marx*, Saul. K.

Padover, ed., (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall), 1979, p. 321.

[3] Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1986, p. 179.

[4] John McMurtry, "Winning the War of the World," Keynote Lecture, Zeitgeist Conference, University of Toronto, March 15th, 2014, p. 12.

[5] Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker, ed., (New York: W.W. Norton), 1978, p. 595.

[6] Marx, *The German Ideology*, p. 83.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

[8] Marx, *The Letters of Karl Marx*, p. 321.

[9] See for example Areil Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics*, (London: Zed Books), 1997; John Bellamy Foster, *The Ecological Revolution*, (New York: Monthly Review Press), 2009; Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature*, (London: Zed Books), 2007.

[10] Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press), 1971, p. 130.

[11] David Camfield, "Theoretical Foundations of an Ant-Racist Queer feminist Historical Materialism," *Critical Sociology*, February, 2014, p.7. <http://crs.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/02/17/0896920513507790> (<http://crs.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/02/17/0896920513507790>)(accessed, march 23rd, 2014).

[12] For a more detailed discussion of these sets of universal life-requirements than is possible here, see Jeff Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life Value*, (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press), 2012.

[13] Jeff Noonan, "Free Time as a Condition of a Free Life," *Contemporary Political Theory*, 8(4), 2009, pp. 377-393.

[14] Karl Marx, "Foundations for the Critique of Political Economy," *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Volume 28, (New York: International Publishers), 1986, p.250.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 251.

[16] Andrew Collier, "Marx and Conservatism," *Karl Marx and Contemporary Philosophy*, Andrew Chitty and Martin McIvor, eds., (London: Palgrave MacMillan), 2009, p. 100.

[17] Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, (Boston: Beacon Press), 1969, p.21.

[18] Giuseppe Tassone, "Democracy at a Standstill: The Idea of Democracy as a Dialectic of Theory and Practice," *Critique*, 41(1), 2013, p. 90.

[19] The turn of phrase which I am adapting is "repressive desublimation" which Marcuse explores in *One-Dimensional Man*. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, (Boston: Beacon Press), 1964, pp. 72-75.

[20] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 3, (New York: International Publishers), 1975, p. 277.

[21] Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities*, (Leiden: Brill), 2013, p. 168.

[22] Hermann Lubbe, "The Contraction of the Present," *High Speed Society*, Hartmut Rosa and William E. Scheuerman, eds., (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press), 2009.

[23] Johnathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, (London: verso), 2013, p. 10.

[24] As a terrifying example of this relentless time pressure, consider the case of an intern working for the American investment bank Merrill Lynch, who died in the summer of 2013 after working straight for more than 48 hours. "Intern Death Leads to Bank Review," *The Toronto Star*, Aug. 24th, 2013, p. A2.

[25] Crary, *24/7*, p. 40.

[26] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (Boston: Beacon Press), 1969, p.xxx.

[27] Crary, *24/7*, p. 46.

[28] Lee Siegel, *Against the Machine*, (New York: Spiegel and Grau), 2008, p. 34.

[29] Anthony Storr, *Solitude*, (New York: The Free Press), 1988, p. 69.

[30] Wolfgang Goethe, "Chinese-German Hours and Seasons," *Selected Poems*, John Whaley, trans., (London: J.M. Dent), 1998, p. 159.

[31] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," p. 326.

[32] Sherry Turkel, *Alone Together*, (New York: Basic Books), 2011, p. 238.

[33] David L. Loy, "Cyberlack," *24/7: Time and Temporality in the Network Society*, Robert Hassan and Robert E. Purser, eds., (Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books), 2007, pp. 207-208.

[34] Goethe, "Art and Nature," p. 83.



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[Thank you Jeff for this essay and your continued support.]

The writer is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Windsor, in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. His most recent book is *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value*, (McGill-Queen's University Press), 2012. More of his work can be found at his website: <http://www.jeffnoonan.org> (<http://www.jeffnoonan.org/>)

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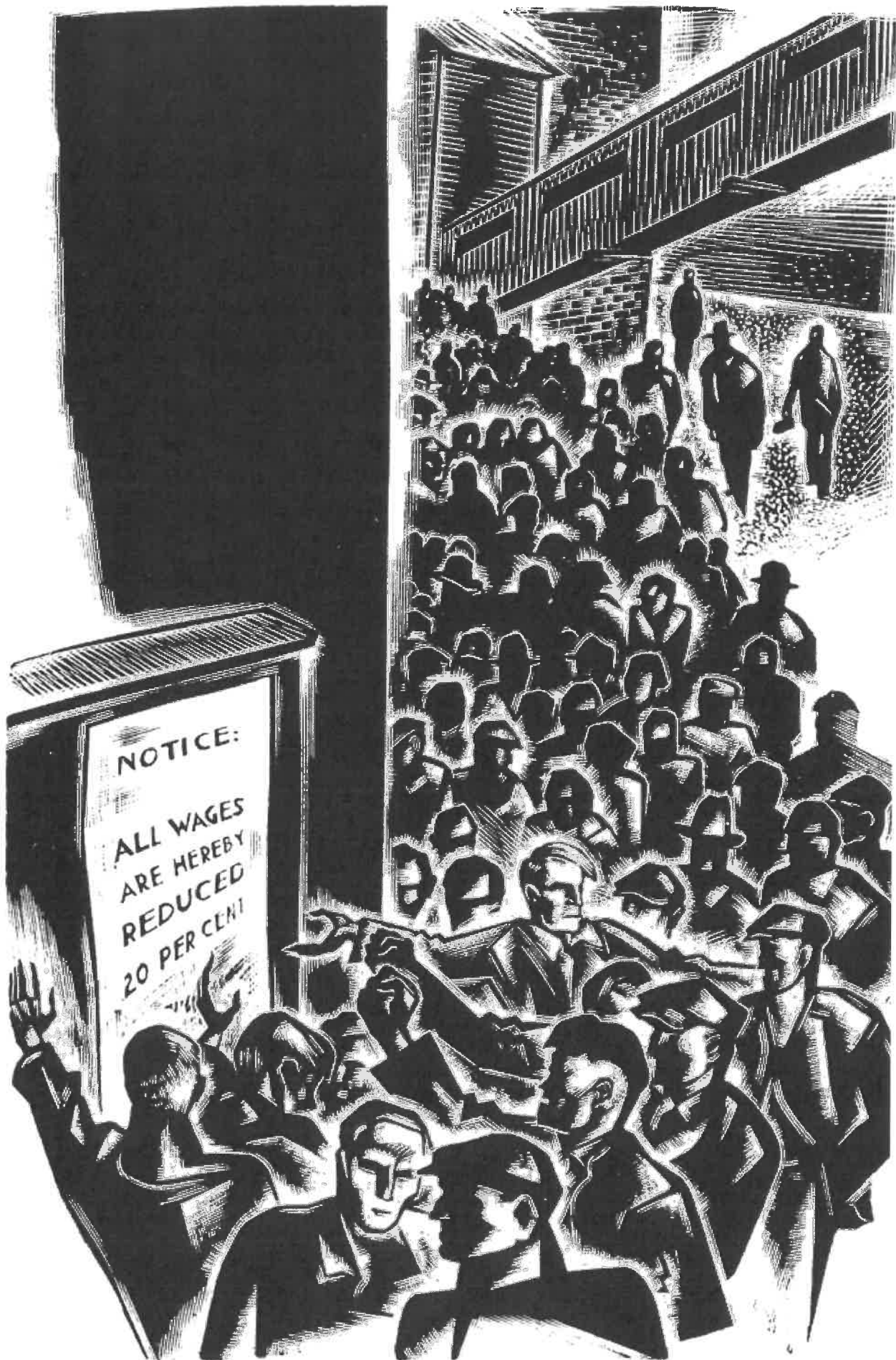
APRIL 22, 2014**APRIL 22, 2014** **SANJAY PERERA****# CAPITALISM**, **# CLASS STRUGGLE**,
CYBERNETIC, **# ECOFEMINISM**, **# ECOLOGY**, **# ECONOMIC CRISES**, **# ECOSOCIALISM**,
EXPLOITATION, **# INTERNET**, **# JEFF NOONAN**, **# LIFE FORMS**, **# LIFE VALUABLE**, **# LIFE-**
COHERENT, **# LIFE-VALUE**, **# MARX**, **# MARXISM**, **# MARXIST THEORY**, **# NATURAL LIFE-**
SUPPORT SYSTEMS, **# SOCIALISM**, **# SOCIALITY**, **# SOLITUDE**, **# STRUGGLE**, **# STRUGGLES**
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Philosophers for Change



Preservative struggles in the age of austerity



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by Jeff Noonan

Despite six years of global economic crisis and austerity, and despite much talk, even amongst liberal economists, of the threats growing inequality poses to democratic forms of capitalism, there has been little effective political mobilization in favour of a socialist alternative. The failure of a global movement for socialism to emerge might seem especially perplexing when the economic crisis is understood as part of a deeper crisis of capitalist society that threatens the natural life-support system as well as the values – individual freedom, equality, social progress – that it has long appealed to for justification. It is true that struggles have erupted – Occupy in North America, large scale protests and movements against austerity in Europe, the Arab Spring in the Middle East – but none have posed the comprehensive challenge to capitalism as underlying cause of the effects (inequality, poverty, the legacy of colonialism) to which these movements responded. Nothing like a “revolutionary left” such as would have been recognizable to late nineteenth and early twentieth century Marxists has yet developed. This fact should tell socialists, especially in the Global North, something of political importance.

It should tell socialists that the very different working and living conditions, the changed cultural formations and self-understandings to which they have given rise, especially amongst the young, have broken, probably permanently, the political self-understanding of workers and oppressed groups and the old organizational forms of the revolutionary left. At the turn of the twentieth century work was organized in massive hierarchical factories connected to local supply chains owned by vertically structured corporations. Unions were politically and culturally vital organizations, there was an active left that formed part of the fabric of life (even for those workers who were not attracted by its politics). Workers lived in class-identified neighbourhoods in which leisure was bound up with work life, played out in union halls or ethnic community centres.

This complex intertwining of work and social life gave rise to a cohesive (but not seamless) working class identity. Today, the structure of work has changed significantly. There are still factories in the Global North, but fewer and fewer people work in large scale industrial enterprises. Supply chains are now global, individuals units of the same corporation are forced to compete with each other, political and economic identity is often formed on a plant by plant basis; the ideology of entrepreneurship has become more ubiquitous, young people are encouraged to and do think of their future as one they will have to invent for themselves; culture has become global and intensely local at the same time, and digital communications networks have created new forms of self and political identity. Hierarchical organization, and not capitalism *per se*, is often identified as the enemy of freedom and creativity.

On the one hand, the critique of hierarchy has promising emancipatory implications (briefly glimpsed during the Occupy movement). On the other hand, it can as easily be directed against the revolutionary left’s traditional form of democratic centralist organization. Suspicion runs high against the very idea of political power as necessary to advancing egalitarian and democratic values. Self-organization, withdrawal into self-contained local alternative economies, and lifestyle changes are far more attractive to young activists than the rhetoric of revolutionary discipline. The organizational structures, as well as the symbols and language of the old left, sound tired and fail to motivate people. John Holloway is not being dogmatically anti-Leninist when he urges people to “change the world without taking power.”[1] Rather he is attempting to draw the lessons of both the failures of the old left and the successes of what he sees as new practices of alternative-world building (as with the Zapatista’s, for example). Whatever weaknesses “horizontalism” might have, there can be little doubt it is a more attractive organizational

structure to newly radicalizing activists than a hierarchical political party.



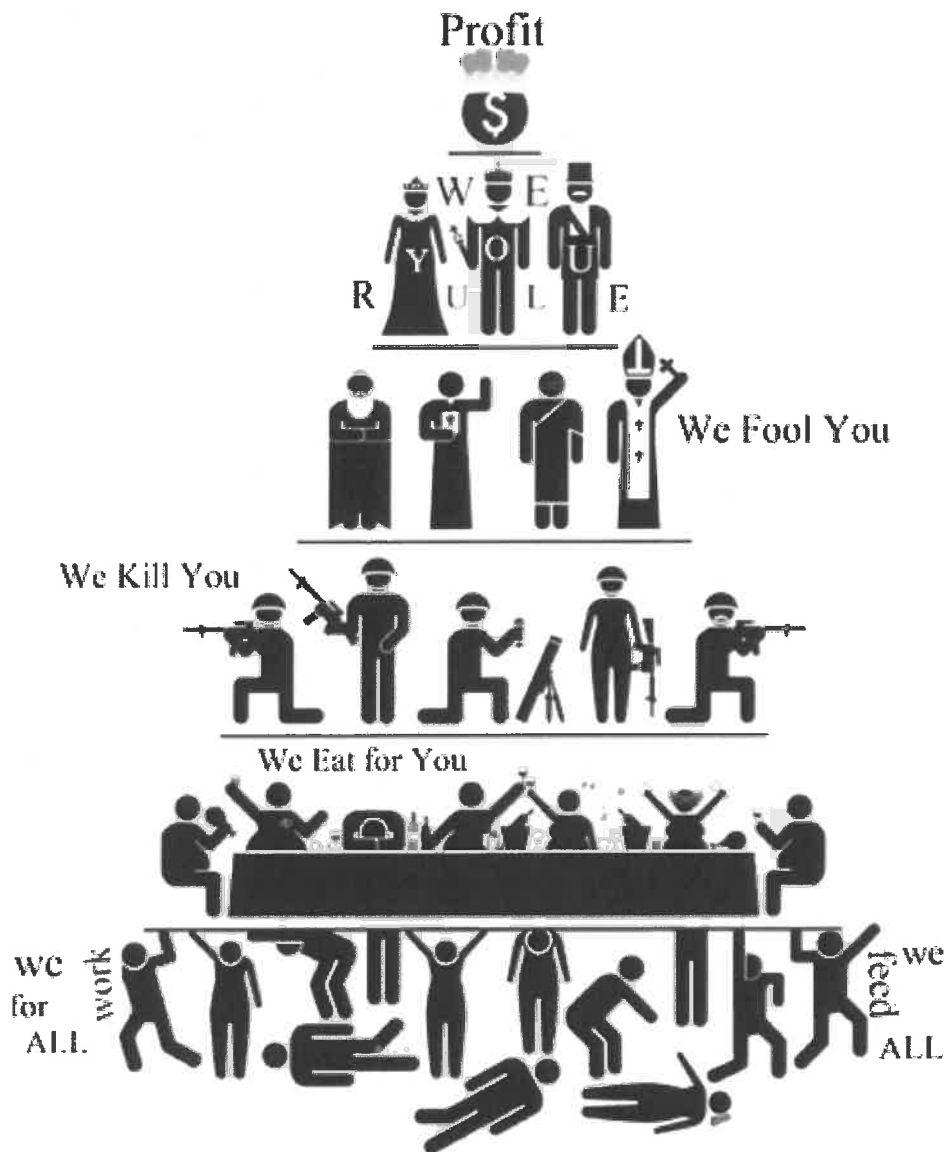
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Nevertheless, if it is the case that the revolutionary left has reached its final chapter, it does not follow that class struggle will end. The texture and goals of working class struggle and the goals of the revolutionary left have never fully coincided, because while working class people have consistently struggled to protect and reclaim life time and space from capitalist attempts to commodify everything essential to life, they have often not identified their goals explicitly with socialism, or, if they have, socialism with the revolutionary overthrow of ruling class power. What they have fought for (and now to protect) is the institutionalization of the principle of democracy and public institutions. Underlying both sets of struggles, I will argue, is a radical alternative to the ruling money-value system of capitalism, a value system which is essentially socialist, whether it is called by that name or not. If struggles for a future systematic alternative society are not in the ascendant right now, it does not mean that struggles for a society governed by life-value standards are not on-going. To find them, however, we have to look to movements that, on first glance, seem to be about the past, about protecting gains that have already been won from the clutches of capitalist privatization.

This essay will examine these “preservative struggles,” arguing that they are an important link to the successful working class struggles of the past and a (potentially) important bridge to the future. I will situate the argument in the context of a contradiction in the history of the Marxist understanding of class struggle and the function of state and social institutions. On the one hand, struggles to control major social institutions that fall short of the revolutionary seizure of power have been dismissed as useless, on the basis of the claim that so long as there is class power, existing social institutions will always serve ruling class interests.

On the other hand, there is a more historically sophisticated argument which asserts that class struggle is not an all or nothing affair but an open-ended process that can make real gains even when revolution is not on the agenda. I will illustrate this contradiction in relation to the two key objects of preservative struggles today: the institutionalization of the principle of democracy and the underlying distributive principle of major public institutions (health care systems, education, etc.). Having set out the terrain of political struggle in the first two sections, I will uncover the life-value system in which these preservative struggles are grounded, demonstrating how it is the radical alternative to capitalism revolutionaries demand, but that its mode and pace of development differs from the all or nothing logic they insist upon. In conclusion, I will draw what I take to be the key political lesson for twenty-first century socialists. Struggles must begin from where people are willing to make a stand. In the global North, at this point in history, people are willing to make a stand to preserve the gains of previous class struggles. Turning preservative struggles into transformative struggles depends upon socialists learning to bring to light this life value system.



CAPITALISM

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Class struggle and the function of social institutions

In *The German Ideology*, Marx argued that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.” [2] The material power of the ruling class derives from its control over the universally required means of life; its ruling intellectual power is an extension from its control over life-resources down through the major institutions through which social life is organized and governed. Of all major social institutions, those that collectively comprise the state—legislatures, courts, the civil service, the armed forces—are the most important because all other social institutions are determined by the laws and policies put into effect by legitimate political power. If it is true that the ruling ideas of any age are the ideas of the ruling class, and that the ruling class rules in its own interests, then it follows that state institutions will be used to legitimate and enforce the particular interests of the ruling class as the universal social interest.

This conclusion is the one Marx draws: “Through the emancipation of private property from the community, the state has become a separate entity, independent and outside civil society; but it is nothing more than the form of organization which the bourgeoisie was compelled to adopt, both for external and internal purposes, for the mutual guarantee of their property and interest.” [3] In other words, while the state has the *appearance* of being a set of neutral institutions amenable to use by any social force capable of garnering sufficient political support to translate its demands into legitimate law, the *reality* is that the state in capitalist society is necessarily subordinate to ruling class power and can never be used to fundamentally transform society.

In this account of state power, the class structure of capitalist society sets internal limits to the capacity of the working class and other oppressed groups to use official state power to reclaim the life resources that have been appropriated by the ruling class and redirect their use from means to the production of money-value to means of satisfying fundamental life-requirements. As evidence in support of this interpretation of state power, Marxists have pointed to the way in which political parties—even those social democratic parties which historically derive from working class struggles—tend to converge on policies which never threaten the dominant property relations and social values of capitalist society. While liberal political philosophers regularly trumpet pluralism as the hallmark of democratic systems, conformity to capitalist system-needs is their truth.



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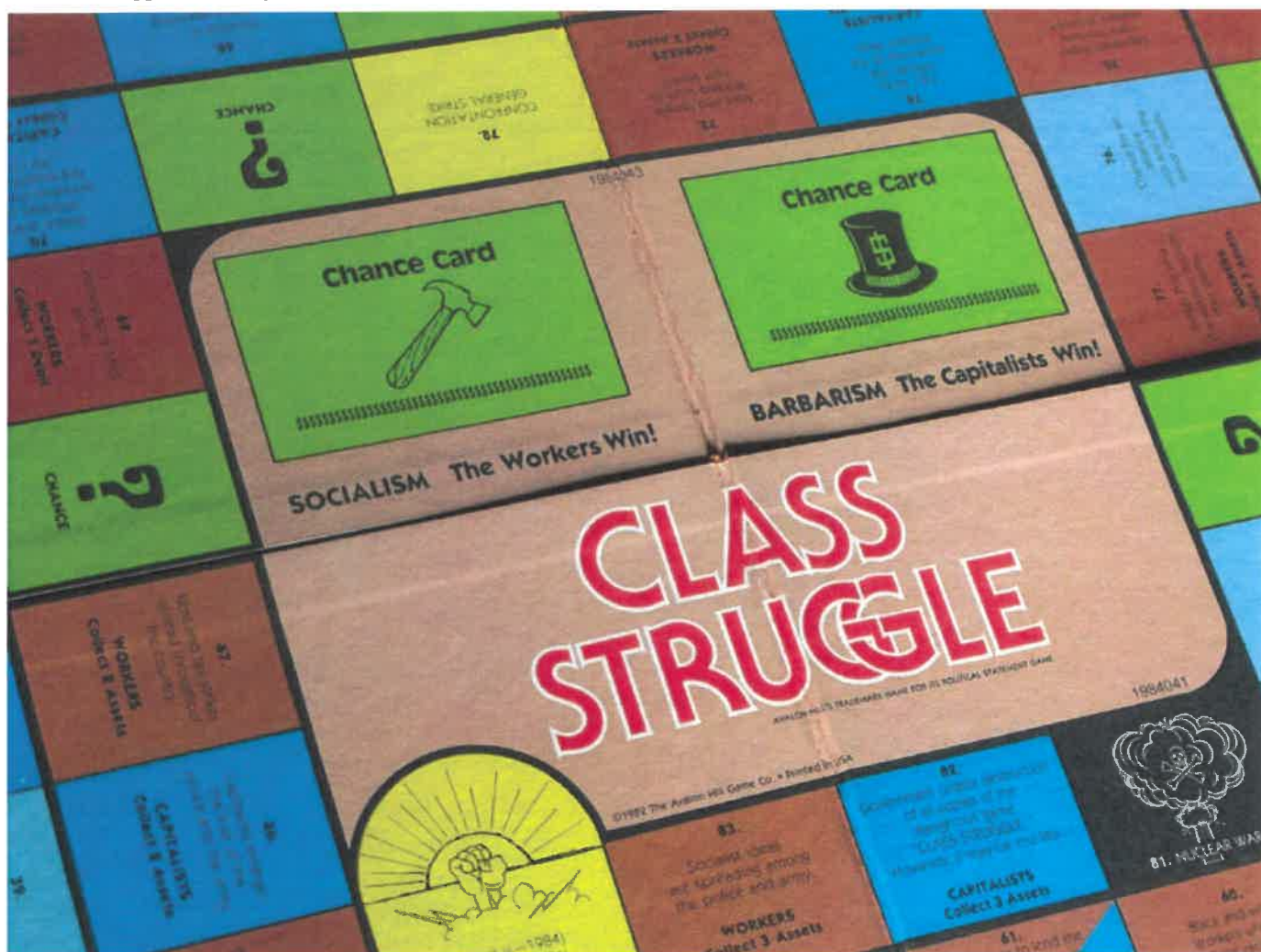
As Ralph Miliband famously argued in *The State and Capitalist Society*,

” the assertion of ... profound differences is a matter of great importance for the functioning and legitimation of the political system, since it suggests that electors, by voting for one or another of the main competing parties, are making a choice between fundamental and incompatible alternatives ... In actual fact, however, this picture is in some crucial ways mystifying ... For one of the most important aspects of the political life of advanced capitalism is precisely that the differences between those leaders ... have very seldom been of the fundamental kind.[4]

There may be differences over how much of the social surplus to tax, or how to spend that money made available by taxation of capital, but the right of the capitalist class to appropriate most of that surplus as its own private property will never be challenged. Miliband's de-mystification of liberal pluralism uncovers an important truth about the centripetal force that class power generates, forcing all parties towards the rhetorical middle while in reality ensuring the perpetuation of private control over universally needed resources. At the same time, it would be wrong to conclude that state institutions are *nothing but* instruments of ruling class power in a capitalist society, precisely because *class struggle* can affect the balance of political forces, and the balance of political forces can affect law and policy in socially important ways.

In contrast to the struggles of, for example, the bourgeoisie for political supremacy, (which was the struggle of a minority with another minority), the struggle of the working class is a struggle of the majority against a minority whose relative size *vis-à-vis* the global population is shrinking as its power and wealth grow. Marx and Engels appreciated the political significance of the majoritarian character of working class struggle already in 1847, *before* capitalist society had adopted majority-rule as the political basis of its legitimacy: "All previous movements were movements of minorities, in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority. The proletariat... cannot stir...without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung up in the air." [5]

This proletarian movement was politically multi-dimensional, in the sense that that it did not aim only (or even for the most part) at the overthrow of class power but attacked class power on numerous, not always programmatically related fronts. If it had a unifying thread, it was for the democratization of social and political life, a set of demands which was by and large successful and which constitutes one of the great legacies of nineteenth century class struggle. "The working class was the most consistently pro-democratic force. The class had strong interests in effecting its inclusion and it was more insulated from the hegemony of dominant classes." [6]



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The reason that the working class was a consistent proponent of social and political democratization is obvious—if society legitimates itself by appeal to majority decisions, then, if the working class gains access to the institutions of political power and votes its own interest, then it can transform society from within, on the basis of legally binding decisions, forcing the ruling class to either accede, or rebel. Of course, it is always possible for the ruling class to rebel against democratization (as in fascist movements, for example), but the fact remains, that democratically exercised power in a democracy can (at least in principle) advance the life-interests of the majority of people.

In other words, official society can be upended by democratic means, provided those means are adequately supported by an extra-parliamentary movement. Engels himself makes the case for the importance of political rights as an organizing basis and plateau of achievement from which new movements against class power can develop:

“ We seek the abolition of Classes. What is the means of achieving it? The political domination of the proletariat. ... revolution is the supreme act of politics; whoever wants it, also wants the means, political action, which prepares for it ... The political freedoms, the right of assembly and the freedom of the press, these are our weapons—should we fold our arms and abstain if they seek to take them away from us? It is said that every political act implies a recognition of the status quo. But when the status quo gives us means of protesting against it, then to make use of these means is not to recognise the status quo.[7]

Revolution in this sense is not a cataclysmic singularity brought about by force of will of professional revolutionaries, but a long term political process which can and must make use of the democratic victories won earlier to advance a more deeply and democratic social agenda.

If it is the case, as Engels argues, that democratic victories create the political space to challenge the *status quo*, then it follows that the *status quo* is not static but a dynamic result of class struggle. In other words, the fact that control over the material conditions of social life confers control over major social institutions does not set any pre-established limits to how far working class and anti-oppression social movements can transform ruling class control in a democratic socialist direction. State institutions are not absolutely fixed in their functions, as a narrow reading of Marx's arguments in *The German Ideology* might suggest, but are responsive to successful class struggles. Holloway and Picciotto are correct to argue that the function of state institutions in any concrete historical context cannot be logically inferred from generic premises about the structure of capitalist society, because the key "pre-requisite for understanding the state" is to root that understanding in "the form and content of the class struggle." [8]

The point is not that electing one or another mainstream party can topple class rule, but rather that any space for democratic organizing is a potential space for contesting class and money-value rule. If workers and oppressed groups are motivated to struggle within the given institutional structures to change the values that determine the priorities and functions of those institutions, but not to attempt the immediate overthrow of the ruling class (as they are doing everywhere in the Global North today) then the historically concrete practice of socialists must be to discover and reveal to those in struggle the universal anti-capitalist implications of these battles to *preserve* the democratic spaces already won. The principle of democracy and the practice of public institutions: democratic socialist spaces in undemocratic capitalist society



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An unsympathetic critic might object at this point that I am doing nothing more than attempting to rehabilitate long-discredited reformist electoralism. Joshua Moufawad-Paul makes a recent passionate case for this counter-argument: “To treat elections as a viable space of struggle now, decades following the ascendancy of a discourse that professed the capitalist end of history, is a grand act of cynicism. This cynicism is one that is already aware that it is not viable to assume that communism can be voted into existence: we know that elections do not matter.”[9] Moufawad-Paul is correct if he intends to argue that elections do not matter on their own and to the extent that they are contested only by liberals, conservatives, and social democrats. If, however, his argument equates electoralism with democratic struggle within the existing institutional spaces and concludes that those struggles can never significantly expand those democratic spaces against the ruling class interest, then he is guilty of conflating two distinct political practices and his conclusion does not follow.

Electoralism is but one—weak—form of the democratic principle. The democratic principle, as David Beetham points out, is a general principle of governance of collective institutions and not essentially connected with elections at all. Any “system of collective decision-making can be said to be democratic to the extent that it is subject to control by all members of the relevant association, or all those under its authority, considered as equals.”[10] Three aspects of Beetham’s understanding of the democratic principle are worth noting in this context. First, it highlights effective participation and not mere

representation of interests as essential to democracy. Second, democratic practices range across all collective enterprises and are not limited to the political institutions of state power. Third, democracy is inconsistent with class rule, since class rule is based upon inequality of access to universally required life-resources. It thus follows that any successful struggle that in anyway institutionalises this principle is a victory over class rule. A victory over class rule does not mean that class rule is completely overcome, but only that it is weakened in that dimension of its exercise lost to democratic forces.



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It is with these considerations in mind that the value of elections must be considered. A blanket principle that "elections do not matter" fails to take into account differences in electoral systems (they can matter a great deal more in jurisdictions in which there is proportional representation than in 'first past the post' systems in which the number of seats taken by each party does not reflect the percentage of the popular vote they gained). It also fails to take into account differences in what can be at stake between the competing parties (there may sometimes be cause to vote for a social democratic party when the only other alternative is a virulent anti-worker agenda, even if the social democratic party will do nothing to advance the struggle for socialism). If the alternative is Syriza or Golden Dawn in Greece, then it is clear that elections do matter, even if Syriza on its own will not be able to resolve the economic crisis still harming the majority of Greek citizens. If the alternative is the Venezuelan Socialist Party or its right-wing opponents, then it is clear that elections do matter, for while the development of "twenty-first century socialism" in Venezuela has been halting, it would be halted altogether and gains rolled completely back were the socialists defeated.

Venezuela is an instructive example for another reason. The enduring strength of the movement is rooted in the fact that it continues to win election after election, undermining the attempts of domestic and foreign critics to portray it as undemocratic. The political power of the moral force derived from continual electoral success should not be underestimated. Marta Harnecker draws the appropriate conclusion:

” Faced with the evident failure of neoliberalism as it was being applied, there emerged the following dilemma: either the neoliberal capitalist model is re-built, or advances are made in constructing an alternative project motivated by a humanist and solidarity-based logic ... it was Chavez who had the audacity to take this second path and I believe President Maduro is trying to continue his legacy. Other leaders such as Evo Morales and Rafael Correa later followed him. All of them are conscious of the fact that the objective economic and cultural conditions, and the existing correlation of forces at a global and national level, obliges them to co-exist for a long time with capitalist forms of production ... they have to do it [build an alternative] on the basis of an inherited state apparatus whose characteristics are functional to the capitalist system, but are not suitable for advancing towards socialism. Nevertheless, practice has demonstrated, contrary to theoretical dogmatism of some sectors of the radical left, that if revolutionary cadres run this apparatus, it can be used as an instrument in the process of building the new society.[11]

It is anachronistic to see the struggle across Latin America in terms of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Leninist dichotomy of reform or revolution: it is an on-going experiment whose goal is to work out a new model of revolution that combines respect for political competition with the use of democratic power to re-appropriate universally required life-resources from the ruling class. To the extent that the re-appropriating drive is successful, to that extent is the material foundation of the new society secured. The problem of securing the material foundation of a new society through collective, democratic control over universally required life-resources brings me to the second subject of this section, the role and value of public institutions.



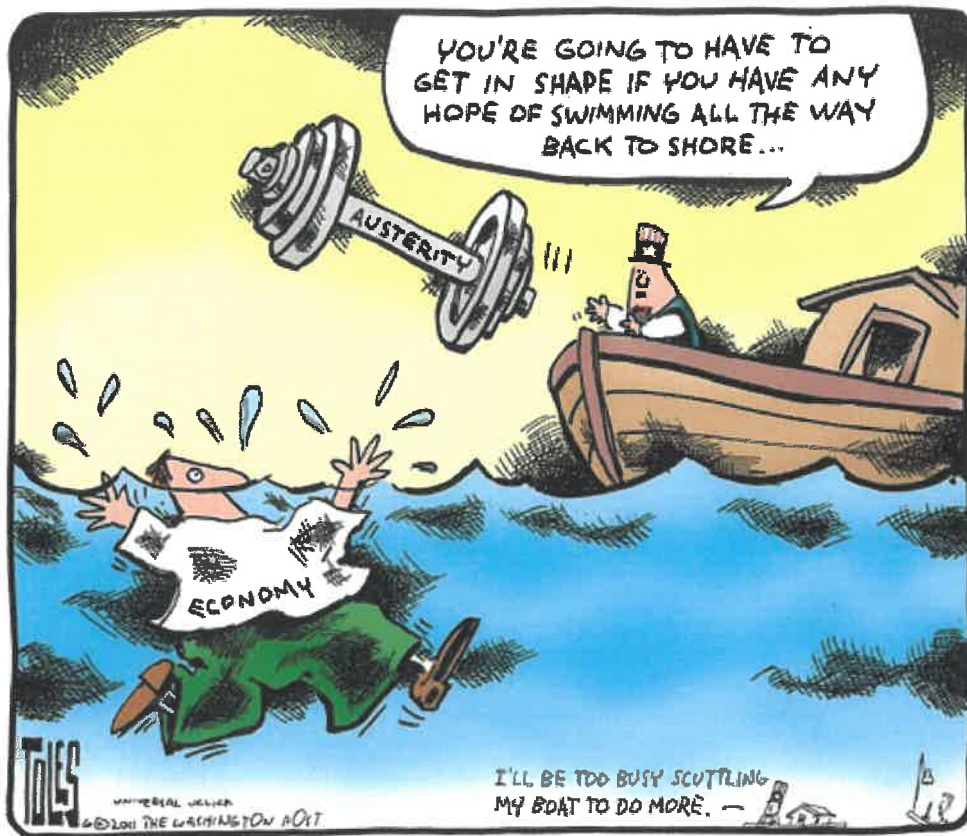
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In liberal social history, the development of public institutions is typically attributed to the development and institutionalization of social rights.[12] However, it is rare, if not non-existent, for actual rights to access major public institutions like health care facilities and practices, drug plans, public pensions,

post-secondary education, public libraries and other cultural institutions to be enshrined in constitutions as legally actionable rights. In any event, it is clear that if we compare the earliest days of capitalism to the nineteen sixties (the high point of social spending on public institutions) the key difference is not legal-constitutional, but political. There is no explaining the increased taxation of capital in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries without making reference to class struggle, both domestic, trade-unions based, and international (the Russian Revolution).[13]

It would be too shallow a view, however, to simply brush off public funding for public institutions as “concessions” meant to dampen class struggle. They were indeed concessions, but, as such, they were proof of successful class struggles and the partial institutionalization of a needs-grounded social morality materially and morally opposed to the ruling money value system of capitalism.[14] The distributive principle of the money-value of social morality is: to each according to her ability to pay for whatever they want, and regardless of the implications for the natural life support system or other people. The principle of the needs-ground of social morality is: to each according to his or her real life requirements, in amounts sufficient for all-round life-capacity development, limited only by the carrying capacity of the environment and the co-equal needs of others.

The money-value ground of social morality legitimates labour and consumer markets as the institutions responsible for the allocation of resources and the distribution of commodities. The needs-ground of social morality, by contrast, legitimates democratic public institutions as primarily responsible for allocation and distribution of the goods required for sustainable life and development. While the institutionalization of the needs-ground of social morality in public institutions was never complete, always in tension with far more powerful market forces, often clumsy and bureaucratic, the vehemence with which those institutions have been attacked under the neoliberal phase of capitalist restructuring indicates that they are not regarded by capitalists as mere reforms, they are seen, and attacked for being, imperfect expressions of a democratic socialist value system.



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That working people and oppressed groups were able, over the course of a century of struggle in the Global North, to re-appropriate collectively produced wealth and force governments to invest it in public institutions that satisfied unmet life-requirements was therefore a tremendous victory. Against the idealism of capitalist consumer demand, which recognizes no distinction between wants for the most useless luxuries and vital necessities without which life cannot persist, struggles for public funding of public institutions proceeded from the material recognitions of the reality of harms unmet needs cause. More than just asserting the reality of needs as against the relativism of selfish desire, these struggles affirmed a view of the human good as free life-capacity realization. Unlike liberal interpretations of positive freedom, this life-value conception of the human freedom does not reduce it to the private acts of each individual in abstraction and in opposition to every other individual. Rather, it understands human beings as socially self-conscious agents who care about each other and the future, who mutually enable each other's capacities for self-expression and enjoyment, and who all together commit themselves to sustainable patterns of interaction and creativity. As McMurtry argues, *the vocation of each individual is to do what s/he can that is of life-value to others and of life-interest to self. For none to shirk the duty of giving back in to what enables the humanity of each is the obligation in return for these rights – the human ordering of social justice.* These are the true bases of self-respect and freedom.[15]

If a society, a) uses collectively produced wealth to, b) satisfy people's real-life-requirements, for the sake of c), enabling each person to realise his or her human capacities in life valuable ways, which are, d) sustainable over an open-ended future for humanity and life on the planet, then that society is in any meaningful politically and morally valuable sense of the term, free in the sense envisioned in the democratic traditions of socialism. My point is not that even at the high point of public funding for public institutions were these four conditions ever comprehensively and universally met but rather that there were no *absolute structural* barriers to struggles in support of their institutionalization.

Furthermore, they were in fact partially institutionalized.

Finally, the neoliberal assault on the principle and practice of public, non-commodified provision of life-necessities has worsened the lives of workers and oppressed people in all ways that really count— security of access to life-necessities, real opportunities for meaningful work, time for self-development, cultural exploration, and free interpersonal interaction. Struggles to preserve these institutions are thus not mere rear-guard actions in support of a dying bureaucratic welfare state. To call them preservative does not mean that they cannot also transform the institutions. The object of the struggle is the principle of non-market, non-commodified provision of shared life-requirements. There may be better forms of delivering these goods than large, often alienating, hierarchical systems (community clinics rather than hospitals, peoples' schools rather than universities).[16] The goal is to supply the good to all who need it because they need that good, and not to protect entrenched structures of power and privilege in public institutions as they stand, because the institutions are marked by the forms of domination typical of capitalist society. The struggles are, at the deepest level, struggles to preserve the freedom of human life from domination by the ruling class interests and labour and commodity markets.



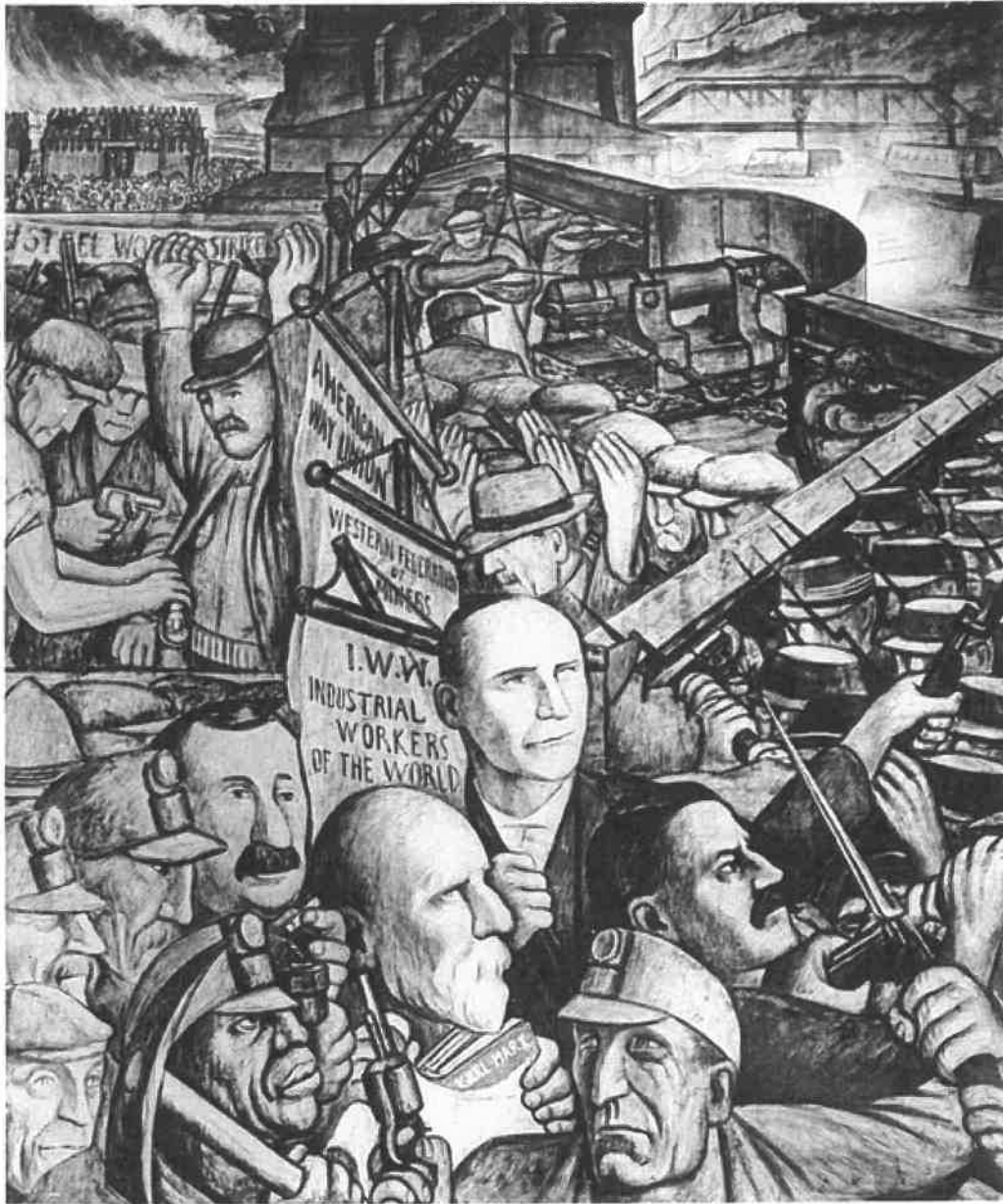
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We know that people threatened by austerity are willing to resist its assaults on their life-conditions. More importantly, although it is never reported in the popular press, resistance has delivered victories, as for example, in Spain, where a determined fifteen month fight that ended last year succeeded in preventing the privatization of six public hospitals in Madrid.[17] Or one could also cite the 2012 Quebec student strike, where a strike against tuition fee increases sparked a month's-long broader social militancy against austerity and for public provision of life-goods as a matter of fundamental social principle.[18] That which people often do not realize, when they are motivated by immediate threats to access to fundamental life-requirements like health care, is the actual opposition they are offering to the dominant institutions and value system of capitalism. There may be some self-conscious revolutionaries

or anti-capitalists in the ranks of protestors, but many may have no explicit interest in politics beyond the immediate struggle. One key to building a new left, I suggest, is to find arguments convincing to those who are concerned to preserve unpaid access to life-goods that what they are essentially defending is a socialist alternative to the dominant institutions and value system of capitalism.

Arguments that prove unconvincing are the arguments typical of vanguard parties of old: if you want real reform, you have to become a revolutionary. We have already noted that vast cultural changes in the Global North have made the sort of hierarchical structures typical of vanguard parties objects of suspicion and/or derision. It is time, therefore, for a new set of arguments that starts from where people are willing to struggle and aims to work with the existing logic of struggle to help it evolve into new forms of democratic mass movement capable of contesting for power, not through armed violence, but a variety of formal and informal democratic means—new party formations that can win elections, new local movements that can build and fund alternative institutions, reclamation of unused spaces for life-productive projects and goals, occupations, struggles to control the boards of public institutions, and any/many other practices yet to be invented.

Alan Sears states the organizational problem clearly: “the challenge for anti-capitalist organizing in the age of austerity is to seek models that locate it as an element within a broader process of building the infrastructure of dissent rather than the decisive moment.”[19] Preservative struggles might be the space in which to find this location. As I have argued above, they will likely continue to erupt in the face of austerity-driven attacks on the principle of democracy and public institutions. They are rooted in a life-value system that is at odds with the money-value system that governs allocative and distributive decisions in capitalism. In the next section I want to deepen the political defence of the value of preservative struggles by focussing attention on the “life-capital” they draw upon, try to preserve, and further develop.



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Life-capital and preservative struggles

History is not only, as Marx argued, the history of class struggle, and it is not only the history of ruptures between one form of society and another. These struggles and these ruptures must play out against an underlying continuity of natural life-support systems upon which all human beings, regardless of class position or concrete identity, depend. Human life is not simply a function of evolution, respiration, reproduction, and metabolism. As Chris Hedges reminds us, life must be consciously cared for and preserved if it is to survive and develop. Care for life has both private and public dimensions. Capitalism, Hedges rightly charges, attacks the public dimension of caring for life which earlier forms of civilization put at the centre of their social orders. Hence Hedges concludes that “only a pre-modern ethic can save us as we enter an era of economic uncertainty and embrace the catastrophe of climate change ... there will have to be a recovery of reverence for the sacred, the bedrock of pre-modern society, so we can see each other and the earth not as objects to exploit, but as living beings to be preserved and protected.”[20] Hedges is correct to see the money-value system of global capitalism as destructive of life, but his prescription for change—the recovery of a pre-modern ethic—

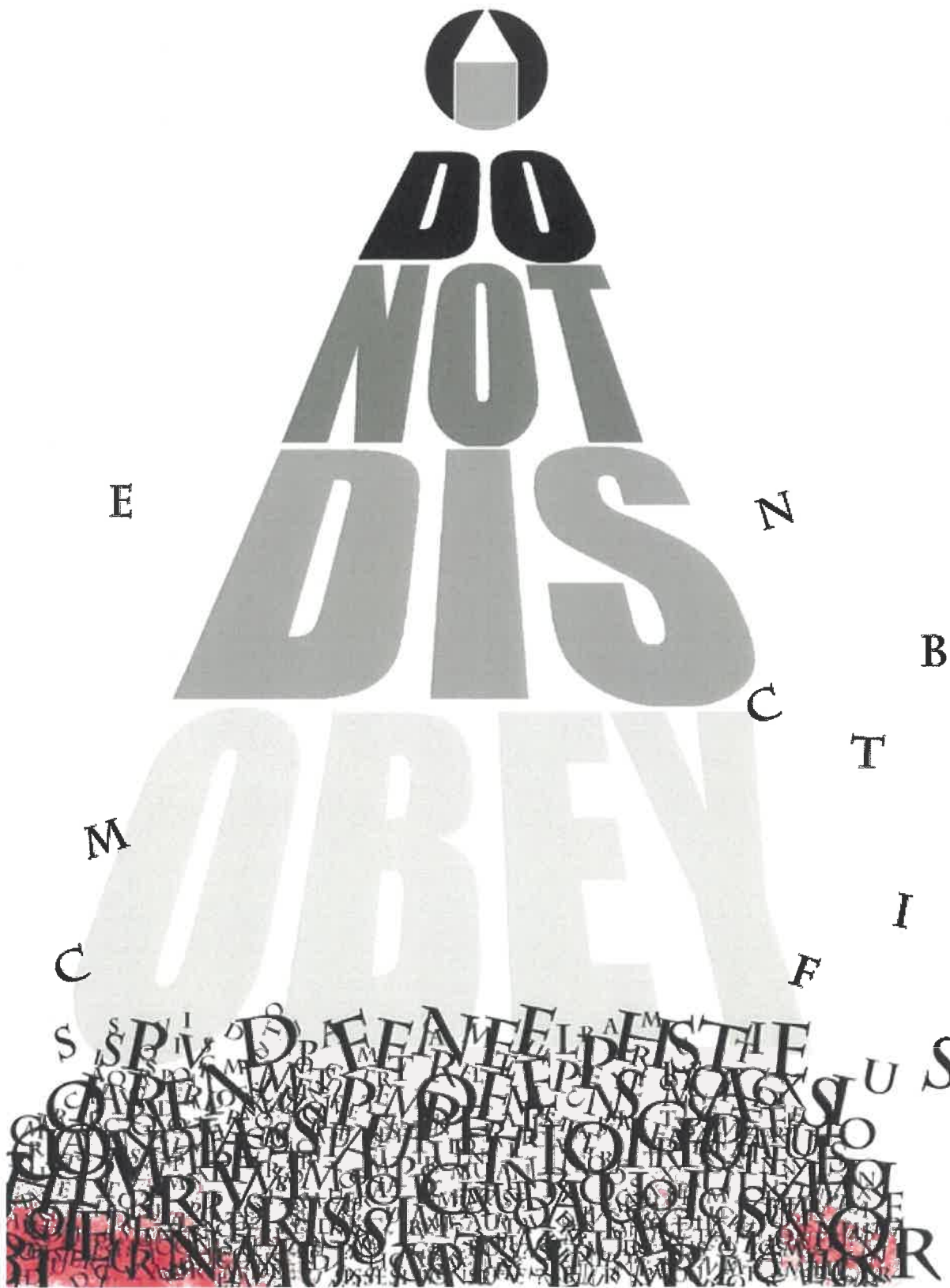
misses the real challenge of the present, which is to find a way to value life and life-support systems without the need to resort to the myths of the sacred that too many people will find anachronistic and unconvincing.

The real basis of reverence for life does not lie in pre-modern mythologies, but in an underlying life-value ground that crosses historical eras and underlies all forms of life.[21] The underlying life-value ground takes different forms of expression, and can often be conceived in partial and contradictory ways. Most often this problem manifests itself as contradictory forms of universality – a ruling group’s system-interest in the exploitation of subaltern groups is projected as in the actual life-interest of those groups. Nevertheless, these contradictory expressions must not blind critics to the actual, concrete universality of a *life-ground* of value: people must access that which they need to survive, think, and act and those resources from which those needs are satisfied is the universal foundation of value everywhere, and at all times. The life-ground is concretely universalised when human labour – physical, intellectual, and artistic – is utilised to produce the material and symbolic goods human life actually requires if it is to develop and flourish.

While individual items of this labour – a loaf of bread, a sweater, a university class – are used up or come to a conclusion – the general production of these life goods goes on, accumulates knowledge that can be passed on, conserves resources for a sustainable future, and seeks protection from the ruling institutions (not classes) of society. That which this labour produces is what McMurtry has recently named “life-capital.” In contrast to money-capital, which accumulates through the exploitation of labour and natural resources at unsustainable rates of use, life-capital accumulates through conscious decisions to ensure the on-going, open-ended production and availability of all that good and meaningful human life requires. As McMurtry explains,

“*Collective life capital does not exist in public or expert meaning. Any common life interest or agency at all is excluded unless it promotes profits. The implications are fatal but unseen. Collective provision of the universal human life necessities that have evolved by long social organization and human evolution are blinkered out of the ruling value mechanism. It sees only mechanical ‘growth’ by commodity sales and profits. Everything that makes a society civilised or liveable is blinkered out – common water and sewage systems for all, free movement pathways and life spaces without cost to use, public libraries with unpriced books and films, non-profit healthcare and disease-prevention by public institutions, public income security from disemployment, old age and disability, life-protective laws including sufficient minimum wages and environmental regulations, primary to higher education without multiplying debts, and family housing, food and means of life assistance for children without parental money.[22]*

The problem with capitalism is not that its ethic is “modern” in contrast to “pre-modern,” “profane” in contrast to sacred, but that its ethic is life-destructive.



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The good life for human beings does not conform to some cosmically pre-determined pattern, as pre-modern, organic cultures tended to believe. That is not to say that where those cultures still exist they should be dismissed as oppressive and violently disrupted and forced to conform to modern norms of individuality. On the contrary, as Hedges rightly notes, there is much to learn about caring and

solidarity from traditional cultures. At the same time, giving free scope to the exercise of individuals' minds in the determination of their life-vocation is an advance for human freedom. But it is an advance only to the extent that the capacity for reflection and choice is supported by life-requirement satisfying institutions—the life-ground across cultures that takes the form of kinship solidarity in traditional societies and public institutions in modern societies, to the extent that there is any recognition of life-value within them. The individual is not an atomic self-maximising desire machine but rather a socially self-conscious member of natural fields of life-support and social fields of life-development. Ensuring the former is sustainable and the latter life-requirement satisfying is the fundamental material basis of freedom worth having, and ensuring that each life is free in this sense—that each chooses the capacities they will develop to create meaning in their own life and add life-capital to the common store—is the deepest ethical foundation of a socialist movement worth participating in.

Simply exchanging one ruling class for another without transforming the value foundation of collective life and the vocations of individual life will lead to the same problems being repeated. To that extent Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen are correct to argue that “the old concept of revolution, ... the mostly sudden, violent overthrow of state power and of social relations,” have been failures, and that the “changes required ... can be started by every woman and every man here and now. But they do need a different perspective, a different vision.”[23] The different vision must take us beyond the exploitative, alienating, oppressive, and life-destructive practices of capitalism and imperialism, but not, as some might still imagine, in one fell swoop.

The old model of revolution saw the sorts of preservative struggles I am defending here as either obstacles to decisive revolutionary action or doomed to failure as capitalist crisis regularly wiped out the gains of earlier class struggles. But this argument misses the crucial point spectacularly. If people are willing to fight on the ground of preservation, then they can (as the Spanish example cited above shows) protect past gains. And if, through political education, people learn that what they are protecting is not this or that particular institution, but a concrete instantiation of a life-value system radically at odds with the capitalist money-value system, then those struggles—if not revolutionary—are elements of a long-term revolution in the moral and material foundations of human society. Those struggles themselves are forms of non-alienated labour—creative human intellectual-creative practice in the service of life-valuable ends—that revolutionaries have typically seen as possible only in a socialist future.

Demonstrating that the values in the name of which revolutions have historically been (unsuccessfully) undertaken are already imperfectly expressed and realized in public institutions, in the principle of democracy, and in the non-alienated labour of political struggle, is far better proof than any abstract theoretical argument that another world is possible, for actuality is the best proof of possibility. To conclude, I want to suggest that preservative struggles are the mediation between successful class struggles of the past and the political confidence necessary to demand the re-appropriation of life-resources currently controlled by the ruling class that a new left will require if it is to emerge and consolidate itself as a real democratic force for change.



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[Graphic: Stephanie McMillan]

Preservative struggles and the future

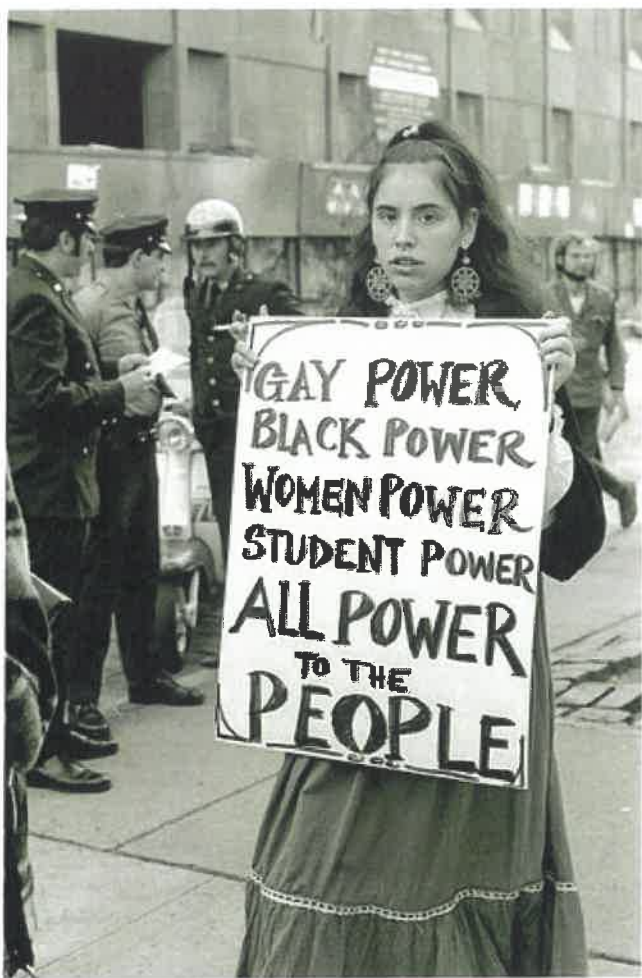
In a recent article examining the latest challenges faced by the European revolutionary left, Panagiotis Sotiris argues against the sufficiency of what I have called here ‘preservative struggles.’ “A contemporary version of the transition program,” he argues

” cannot be reduced to simple calls for redistribution and defence of public services. It has to be a more profound search for a different road for societies, including a different social and economic paradigm, based upon new forms of democratic public ownership, self-management, new networks of distribution, and different social priorities. It is not going to be an ‘easy road.’ It would require a struggling society actually changing values, priorities, narratives. It would also require a new ethics of collective participation and responsibility, of struggle and commitment to change.[24]

Sotiris might be correct in the abstract to point to the need for the formulation of systematic alternatives to capitalism in terms of a transitional program, but what he fails to see is that there is no audience for such abstract formulations, and no evidence that anyone on the far left has the stature and credibility to help build an audience. What is to be done in this case has to conform to the contours of the political spaces in which people have proven themselves willing to fight—to preserve public goods and protect the democratic principle. Pushing the struggle forward into more decisive challenges to capitalist class structure and other forms of unjust power and deprivation that dominate the lives of oppressed groups involves, as a first step, not writing a transition program no one is likely to read, but uncovering, in constructive dialogue with those already present in struggle, the alternative value system that actually underlies preservative struggles—the life-value ground that is the true basis of Sotiris’ “ethics of collective participation and responsibility.”

It is also the basis which, once recognised, allows the socialist left to learn from the past without being hostage to it. As Sears argues, “the anti-capitalist left needs to avoid nostalgia, being haunted by the ghost of class struggle past as if work, life, and politics had not substantially changed. At the same time, this left must avoid amnesia, being seduced by the ghost of class struggle future to the point of forgetting or erasing the legacy of past mobilizations.”[25]

What is the legacy of past mobilizations? Re-appropriation of universally required life-resources, institutionalization of life-grounded principles of distribution, life-coherent limits on the exploitation of natural environments, and the realization across various institutions of the democratic principle. It goes without saying that this legacy is mixed up with failure, with successful capitalist resistance, with ossified forms of bureaucratic management, and with lingering scars of racism, sexism, and homophobia marring the surface achievements.



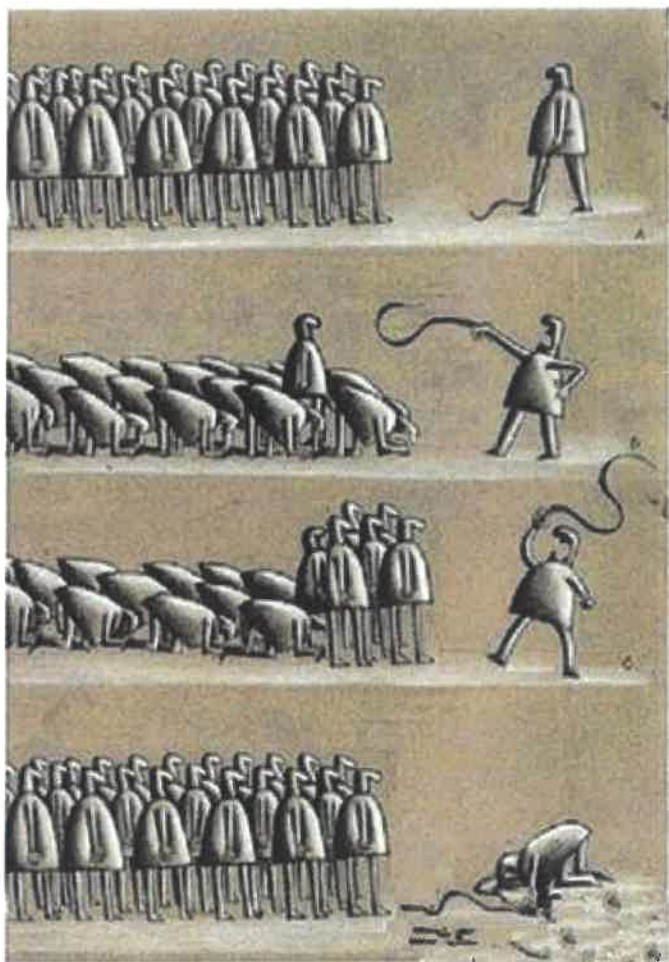
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However, none of these problems and limitations can be overcome by the formulation of theoretically coherent transitional programs that resonate with few beyond the authors and their supporters. The goal of such programs is sound – the fundamental transformation of capitalist society into a democratic, socialist, life-economy whose governing value is the freeing of human intelligence, creativity, and the capacity for mutualistic interaction and relationship from service to the life-destructive production of money-value. Yet, the last forty-five years of struggle, from the last wave of system-wide uprisings in the Global North to the present seems to teach the lesson that the language, the modes of theorizing, the forms of organization, and the temporal structure of revolution have changed. The left must learn to move gradually and over the long term, or risk complete stasis, followed by even further regression, and possible disappearance altogether in favour of completely de-centralized, 'horizontalist' movements that have not proven capable of successfully challenging power in the centres of global capitalism.

The attempt to re-ground movements for a systematic alternative to global capitalism in life-value foundations is not to forsake the heritage of the revolutionary left. It is to preserve the essential value that always underlay its critique of capitalism and its counter-vision but what was often not understood or foregrounded by revolutionaries, fixated as they tended to be on the question of class power and not on value systems. That value was, as Marx himself put it, non-alienated labour understood as "life-engendering life," activity which creates the conditions in which other people can not only survive, but freely develop their capacities in life-engendering ways.[26] Does the labour of nurses, doctors, educators, sanitation workers, home builders, artists, mothers, fathers, and farmers engender life? Of course it does. What should this fact tell us: that that which makes human life good is not awaiting us in a socialist future that has to be built from the razed ground of capitalism. Good human lives are lives

that are meaningful, and meaningful lives are full of activities and relationships in which we feel valued by others because we produce and relate to them in ways that are life-valuable to them.



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What is the main threat to this goodness? Money-capital, the labour and commodity markets that produce it, that subordinate people's life-requirements to the system-need to always make more of it, and the appropriating class always struggling to control as much of it as possible. The deep opposition is between the value of life as expressed in good human relationships and vocations and the institutions and principles that protect and enable them, and the value of money, a non-living system need that gains power by separating people from the resources that they need to survive, develop, and flourish as socially self-conscious creative individuals. If the problem is the usurpation of the life-ground by money, then the solution must involve: a) preserving that degree of life time and space that has not yet been colonized by money-value driven markets, and b) re-appropriation, steadily, over time, as objective and subjective political conditions permit, life-support systems from their destructive subordination to those markets. The point at which the project is complete is clear—the struggle is over once all universally required life-resources are under democratic control and utilised in sustainable, life-coherent ways.[27] The time frame over which the project unfolds must remain uncertain.

This conclusion will be attacked as conservative and reactionary by those who remain haunted, as Sears noted, by the ghost of class struggle past. Some, like Moufawad- Paul, believe that “revolutionary science” and armed class struggle is the only road to success (even though he cannot point to any successes, and admits that recent and existing struggles that he cites as examples, Sendero Luminoso in Peru and the Maoist takeover of Nepal, have been failures).[28] In the Global North, any attempt to replicate these movements or adapt their tactics would be doomed, not only because of the strength of

the state, but because such tactics have no historical roots in the cultures they seek to transform, and must remain Church-basement curiosities in consequence. We either transform our societies through democratic, militant but peaceful movements, or there will be no movement. The trend-line in the Global North is clear: people are not motivated by the revolutionary rhetoric that emerged in the period of industrial capitalism.

As I noted in Part One, Marx and Engels never stood apart from where working people chose to stand and fight. Today it is clear where people are choosing to stand and fight—to protect the principle of democracy (against its institutionalised sham of practice) and the principle of life-requirement satisfaction embodied (imperfectly) in public institutions. They are willing to stand up to protect spaces not yet reduced to objects of exploitation of capitalist money-value, and express their need for meaningful, life-serving work. In other words, they are willing to oppose themselves to what they see are the life-destructive effects of capitalism, but they do not see that this opposition requires donning a red star. So the left must choose between a political practice that is preservative, gradual, but revolutionary in terms of the values that underlie it (i.e., the real substance of socialism as a *progressive* alternative to capitalism) or the symbols of a past generation of revolutionaries—the idealism of revolutionary hope ungrounded from any historical materialist assessment of the real state of class struggle.



<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/post1-3.jpg>

End notes:

- [1] John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, (London: Pluto Press), 2005.
- [2] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1975, p.67.
- [3] *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- [4] Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, (London: Quartet), 1973, p. 64.
- [5] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 1987, p. 44.
- [6] Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1992, p.8.

[7] August H. Nimtz Jr., *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, (Albany: SUNY Press), 200, p. 225.

[8] John Holloway and Sol Picciotto, eds., *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate*. (London: Edward Arnold), 1978, p.30.

[9] Joshua Moufawad-Paul, *The Communist Necessity*, (Montreal: Kersplebedeb Publishing), 2014, pp. 124-5.

[10] David Beetham, *Democracy and Human Rights*, (London: Polity Press), 1999, pp. 4-5.

[11] Marta Harnecker, "New paths require a New Culture on the Left," *The Bullet No. 1026*, August 26th, 2014. <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1026.php> (<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1026.php>) (Accessed, September 20th, 2014).

[12] See, for example, T.H. Marshall, *Sociology at the Crossroads and Other Essays*, (London: Heinemann), 1964.

[13] As the best mainstream economists will acknowledge. See for example Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press), 2014, p. 500.

[14] For a complete discussion of the needs-based social morality that underlies socialism, see Jeff Noonan, *Democratic Society and Human Needs*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press), 2006.



(<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2014/11>

[/strug1-1.jpg](#))

[15] John McMurtry, "Human Rights versus Corporate Rights: Life Value, the Civil Commons and Social Justice," *Studies in Social Justice Volume 5, Issue 1*, 2011, p. 35.

[16] Thanks to Josephine Watson who, drawing on her work as a critic of existing public health care systems in Canada, pointed out to me, in private conversation, the limitations of existing public

institutions and the need to develop struggles for better forms of public provision.

[17] Esther Vivas, "Spain: Popular Resistance Delivers Results," *The Bullet*, No. 934, February 7th, 2014. <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/934.php> (<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/934.php>) [Accessed, October 2nd, 2014].

[18] Matthew Brett and Rushdia Mehreen, "Just the Beginning: Beyond the Québec Student Strike," *The Bullet*, No. 711, October 10, 2012, <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/711.php> (<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/711.php>) (Accessed, September 4th, 2014).

[19] Alan Sears, *The Next New Left: A History of the Future*, (Halifax: Fernwood Books), 2014, p. 100.

[20] Chris Hedges, "The Power of Imagination," *Truthdig*. http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_power_of_imagination_20140511 (http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_power_of_imagination_20140511) (Accessed, August 9th, 2014).

[21] For a complete discussion of the life-ground, see John McMurtry, *Value Wars*, (Toronto: Garamond), 1998.

[22] John McMurtry, "Winning the War of the World," Keynote Lecture, Zeitgeist Conference March 15th, 2014, University of Toronto, p.10.

[23] Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies, *The Subsistence Perspective*, (London: Zed Books), 1999, p. 22.

[24] Panagiotis Sotiris, "How Can We Change the World, If We Can't Change Ourselves? The Challenges Facing the Anti-Capitalist Left in Europe," *The Bullet*, No. 1056, November 16th, 2014. <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1056.php> (<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1056.php>) (Accessed, Nov. 16th, 2014).

[25] Sears, *The Next New Left: A History of the Future*, p. 113.

[26] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," *Marx and Engels, Collected Works*, Vol. 3, (New York: International Publishers), 1975, p. 276.

[27] On the principle of life-coherence that underlies this claim, see John McMurtry, "Human Rights versus Corporate Rights," p. 14.

[28] Moufawad-Paul, *The Communist Necessity*, p. 147.



(<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/centjus1.jpg>)

[Thank you indeed Jeff for this piece and your continued support. On another note, Dec. 4th is the third anniversary of *Philosophers for Change* and we give full thanks to all contributors for their support and commitment. And thank you to all readers for your interest.]

The writer is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Windsor, in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. His most recent book is *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value*, (McGill-Queen's University Press), 2012. More of his work can be found at his website: <http://www.jeffnoonan.org> (<http://www.jeffnoonan.org>)

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DECEMBER 2, 2014 DECEMBER 2, 2014 SANJAY PERERA # AGE OF AUSTERITY, # CAPITALIST CIVILIZATION, # CAPITALIST LIFE CRISIS, # CLASS STRUGGLE, # DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES, # END OF HIERARCHY, # HORIZONTALISM, # JEFF NOONAN, # LIFE FORMS, # LIFE VALUABLE, # LIFE-COHERENT, # NATURAL LIFE-SUPPORT SYSTEMS, # NEW LEFT, # PRESERVATIVE STRUGGLES, # REVOLUTIONARIES, # REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT, # REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY, # REVOLUTIONARY THEORIZING, # SOCIALISM

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Philosophers for Change

The dialectic of the local and the global



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by Jeff Noonan

Interpreted from the perspective of revolutionary politics, the relationship between the local and the global is at once spatial and temporal. Life unfolds in the *here* and *now*, but the forces that structure actions in the here and now have a history. In turn, actions in the here and now have future implications for the configuration of the spaces in which life is lived, the experience of time within which activity unfolds, and the forces that determine both. A frozen moment, like a space not contiguous with other spaces, is an abstraction but not a matrix within which real human lives can be lived. Thought through politically, the problem of the relationship between the local and the global is that life-requirements must be procured day after day in the local spaces in which people live, but the socio-economic forces that determine the availability of life-requirement satisfiers operate globally. The pressure of natural necessity pressing people to satisfy their life-requirements today runs into the socio-historical problem of the open-ended time it would take to transform the global forces responsible for commodifying the life-goods people require. If people focus on the here and now, they leave the larger structural problems affecting their lives untouched; if they work to resolve those larger structural problems, they may have to sacrifice their own or others' immediate needs for the sake of the struggle. Since, however, immediate needs cannot be ignored save on pain of serious harm or death, people understandably concentrate their energies on the local context, ensuring, perhaps, that their most basic life-requirements are met, but at the cost of allowing the life-blind dynamics of the capitalist money-value system to continue unchallenged (at a global, systematic level). Anti-capitalist movements seem trapped in a contradiction: if their members do what they need to do to *survive as individuals*, they must focus on the local and immediate context. If they focus on the local and immediate context, they do not build the broad-based long-term movements the world needs to transform the life-destructive dynamics of global capitalism that are the cause of wide-spread life-requirement deprivation.

In a conversation with renowned Detroit activist Grace Lee Boggs at the United States Social Forum in 2012, Immanuel Wallerstein articulated this problem clearly. "People live in the present," he argued. "Everybody has to eat today, not tomorrow. Everybody has to sleep today, not tomorrow. Everybody has to do all these just ordinary things today, and you can't just tell people that they have to wait another five or ten or twenty years, and it is going to get better ... So you've got to worry about today, but you can't worry only about today." [1] The pressing political question is, therefore: how can local and global, present and future struggles be dialectically synthesised? In other words, how can we struggle today in ways that generate coherent momentum towards larger scale and deeper structural transformation of the capitalist money-value system and the life-destructive socio-economic forces its competitive dynamics engender?

Traditionally, vanguardist revolutionary parties have exhorted their members to sacrifice their present for a future of universal liberation. There may be times when sacrifice is necessary in history, but as a principle of liberation it is self-contradictory. It affirms the equal value of all human lives and establishes this as the moral foundation for its critique of class power. In practice, however, present life is reduced to its instrumental value for the struggle only, and future life alone is regarded as intrinsically valuable (that is, only in the future will human beings enjoy the social conditions necessary for intrinsically valuable lives). Those existing now must deny the intrinsic value of their lives for the sake of the future lives who will be able to enjoy the full intrinsic value of human life, because of the willingness of revolutionaries to sacrifice theirs in the present. Trotsky's "Testament," written just before he was murdered, movingly invokes this contradiction: "Natasha has just come up to the window from the courtyard and opened it wider so that the air may enter more freely into my room. I can see the bright green strip of grass beneath the wall, and the clear blue sky above the wall, and sunlight everywhere. Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence and enjoy it to the full." [2] Trotsky is right: life *is* beautiful, and it does need to be cleansed of evil and oppression. But

must those charged with the duty of so cleansing it struggle in an all or nothing way which prevents *them* from enjoying all those beautiful aspects of life that are not directly related to political struggle? The present essay is an attempt to sketch the outlines of a means of transformational but not self-sacrificial politics.



The ultimate value of life depends upon awareness and the power of contemplation rather than upon mere survival.

(Aristotle)

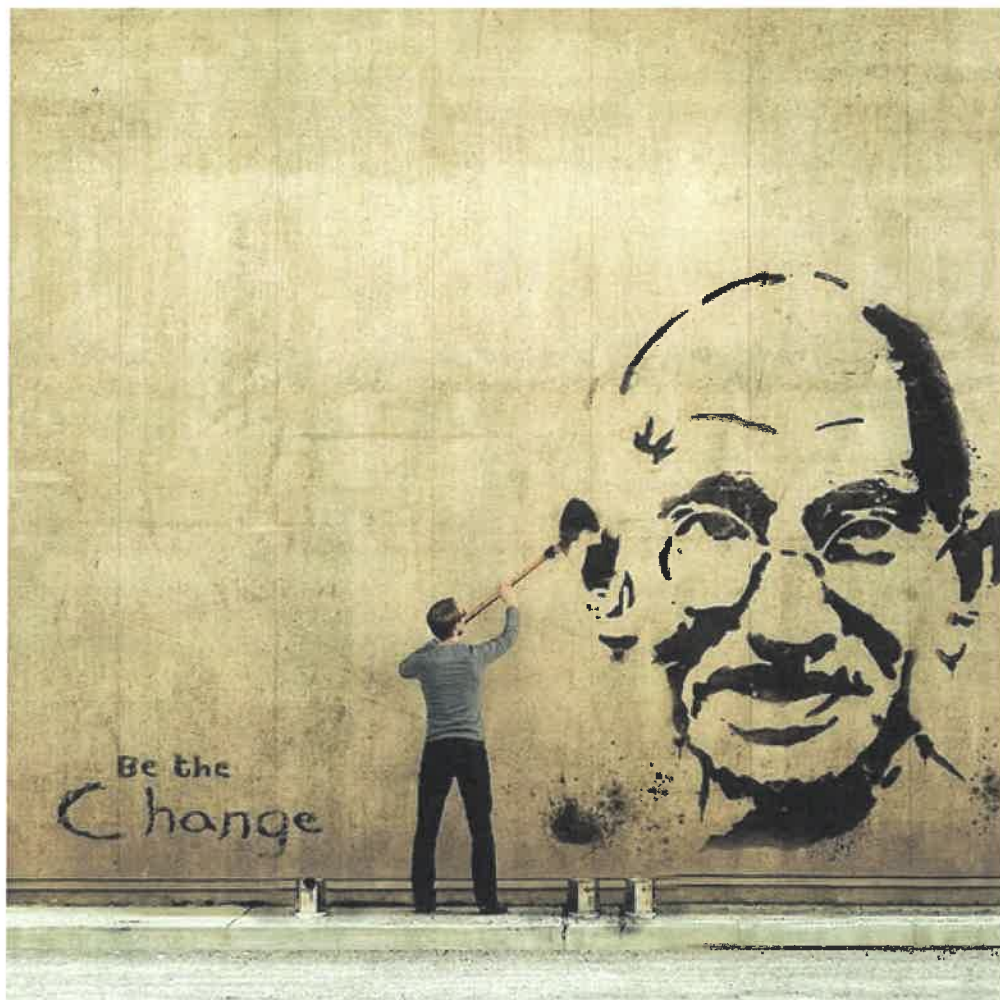
izquotes.com

<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/diaarist.jpg>

On initial consideration, the contradiction might appear unresolvable. Either one takes care of the here and now, or one sacrifices one's immediate needs (and encourages others to do so) to build a struggle to overthrow the rule of the capitalist class and rebuild society completely. However, as David Harvey reminds us in his most recent argument, political movements must maintain a dialectical understanding of contradiction. "There are two basic ways in which the concept of contradiction is used. The commonest and most basic derives from Aristotle's logic, in which two statements are held to be so totally at odds that both cannot possibly be true ... The other ... way ... arises when two seemingly opposed forces are simultaneously present within a particular situation, or entity, or event." [3] The contradiction between the local and the global, there here and now and the future, is a dialectical and not logical contradiction. It can therefore be resolved if modes of political action are devised that reclaim local and immediate life-time and space from exploitation by the money-value system in ways that build a global alternative capable of consolidating local gains at the level of national and international institutions. If such a movement can be built, then a new, democratic life-economy can be constructed without present life-interests being sacrificed in a wholesale fashion.

I will develop my argument in three steps. In the first, I will explicate the localist position in favour of focussing political energies on the reclamation of life-spaces and times in the immediate here and now, using the theoretical and practical work of Grace Lee Boggs as my core example. In the second, I will expose the weaknesses of localism, drawing as needed on the work of Harvey, John McMurtry, and Greg Sharzer. The great strength of localism is that it does not wait for the objective conditions for a global revolution to appear, but instead chooses to act, with the people and materials at hand, to enable others through their own efforts to satisfy their needs and thus free their lives, so far as possible, from the power of capitalist money-value. Its main weakness, I will demonstrate, is that it cannot overcome

the global power of money-value. Since the local is the material reality of the global, failure to control the international flows of money-value ultimately means failing to *consolidate* control over reclaimed local life-spaces and because, by eschewing the struggle for state power, localists have no means of securely *institutionalizing* whatever practical gains they might have achieved. Thus, the key to resolving the contradiction between the local and the global, I will argue in the concluding section, is the construction of new democratic parties at the national level which can forge organic political connections at the international level, progressively choking off the escape routes money-capital currently employs to evade subordination to life-value principles. Despite its recent and current challenges, I will use Syriza as an example of what such parties should look like.



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I: Being the Change You Want to See

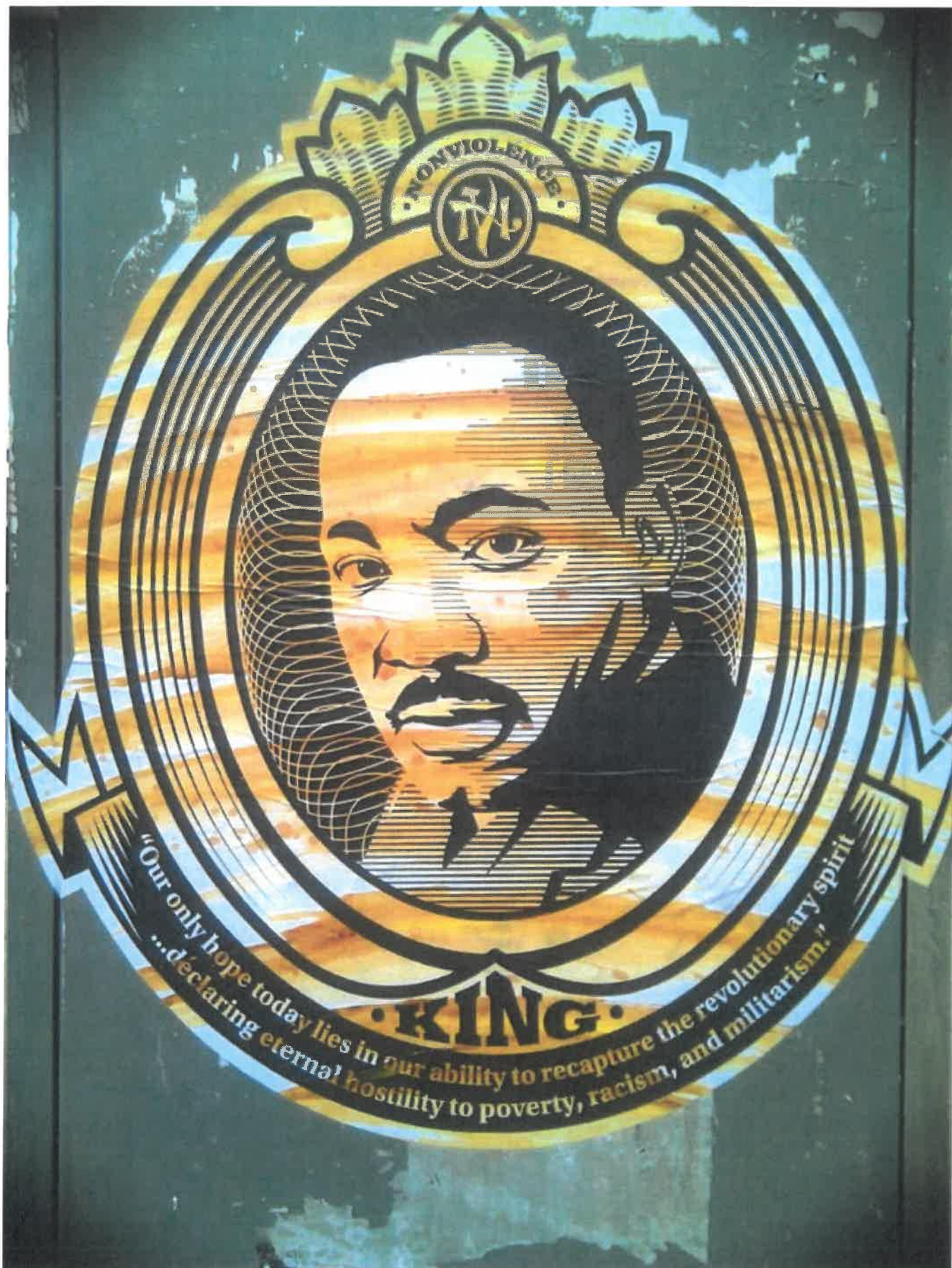
Over a storied revolutionary career that has taken her from the Trotskyism of C.L.R. James' Johnsonite tendency to a leading figure in Detroit's Black Power movement to her on-going community-transforming work on Detroit's east side, Grace Lee Boggs has developed profound insight into the limits of the nineteenth and twentieth century models of revolution. Boggs did not abandon revolutionary Marxism in favour a tepid parliamentary liberalism, but in favour of what she regards as a new model of revolution appropriate for contemporary circumstances in advanced capitalist societies.[4] Her critique of that model of revolution demonstrates a keen understanding of the fundamental principle of historical materialism: human practice responds to concrete demands in ways that unintentionally but decisively alter future social circumstances. If revolutionary theory and practice

are dialectally linked within the matrix of social life, then as social life changes, revolutionary theory must change too, (or become moribund dogma that speaks to no one). The old model of revolution, whereby a vanguard party organizes the working class and allied “masses” for the once for all conquest of state power has been tried and found wanting in those societies in which it was successful in conquering state power. That politics has never had mass appeal in most North American and European countries, and there is absolutely no empirical basis for any belief that it will be able to attract adherents now. Moreover, according to Boggs, there are intrinsic political and philosophical problems with that old model that undermine the credibility of its emancipatory claims.

Boggs makes three specific criticisms that need to be examined carefully. First, she claims that the Leninist and Maoist conceptions of vanguard parties are anachronistic. Since historical materialists are committed to understanding a changing reality, adherence to anachronistic models of organization is contrary to the principles of historical materialism. Second, there was a deep political flaw in the model of the vanguard party from its origin: they tended to treat the mass membership as instruments of the leadership who alone could understand the complexities of the revolutionary struggle. Once faced with external and internal threats, it was easy for these parties to become closed authoritarian military-command structures that choked off the democratic energies of workers and the oppressed they claimed to mobilise and rely upon. Third, the understanding of revolution as requiring the conquest of state power ignored the spheres of everyday life where most of what is valuable and meaningful (life-requirement satisfaction, friendship, care and concern, beauty, creation, love) is found. Party discipline hardened personalities and valorized a macho attitude towards politics that contributed to the totalitarian disasters that ensued the conquest of state power. She sums up her critique: “leftists, and many other people who are not leftists, have tended to hold on to a concept of revolution created in the early twentieth century that involves the seizure of state power by a party representing the working class ... Those leftists who pride themselves on being ‘revolutionary’ have usually sought to distinguish themselves from liberals and social democrats who are ‘reformists’ and lack the will and chutzpah to seize state power and try to bring about wholesale social change.”[5] While revolutionaries of this sort did not lack for chutzpah, they failed to bring about the sorts of changes they claimed trying to make.

From these three criticisms, but especially the historical fact of political failure, she draws the practical conclusion that a new understanding of revolution and a new, local community based politics of open-ended life-space and time reclamation is required if the global problems capitalism continues to cause are to be solved. To be a revolutionary today means, according to Boggs, rejecting, at the level of everyday lived practice, the alienating and eco-cidal values of capitalism: waste of life-time in pursuit of empty consumer pleasures, waste of life-resources through their conversion into money, competition, conflict, and violence. Politics is not so much matter of organization outside of and apart from the spaces of everyday life as it is a personal commitment—sustained and nurtured by community connections—to live more simply, more self-and small collective-sufficiently, and with greater moral and ecological integrity. Politics is not about proving others wrong but living in the right way. For Boggs, living the right way demands that people replace the capitalist cash nexus with ties of mutual care and concern as the determining social bonds between people. Since our values are determined by the choices that we make, and there are no external, structural causes that absolutely determine our choices, we are free *today*, she believes, and not in some always deferred post-revolutionary future, to adopt life-affirming values. “The next American revolution,” she argues, “is about living the kind of lives that will not only slow down global warming, but also end the galloping inequality both inside the country and between the Global North and South. It is about creating a higher humanity instead of a higher standard of living dependent on Empire. It is about ... being the change we want to see in the world.”[6] Rather than

awaiting the structural conditions for the socialist “new human” to emerge, Boggs demands that everyone change the one thing it is in their power to change—themselves.



<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/diamlk.jpg>

Boggs' allusion to Gandhi's challenge to system-critics to be the change they want to see is no accident. The major political and philosophical influences on her rethinking of the meaning of revolution are Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. The principles which she derives from both thinkers is a commitment to non-violent direct action, occupation and recuperation of life-time and space for the satisfaction of local needs, and the necessity of what she calls a spiritual transformation of our inner lives. She does not demand this transformation of people considered as abstract individual atoms of desire, but as socially self-conscious members of communities. Indeed, the spiritual dimension, for Boggs, is not a heaven above, but emergent from mutualistic social relationships below:

” The main reason why Western civilization lacks spirituality, or an awareness of our interconnectedness with one another and the universe, according to Gandhi, is that it has given priority to economic and technological development over human and community development ... Traditional societies lacked our material comforts and conveniences, but individuals had more Soul, or a belief in the individual's power to make moral choices, because their societies valued the community relationships that they depended upon for their survival.[7]

“Spirit” and “matter” are thus mediated by life-valuable community relationships. Spirituality just is the real interconnections of living things with each other and their sustaining environments raised to consciousness. For Boggs, this sense of “Soul” is the philosophical foundation of a genuinely revolutionary rejection of the ultimately unsatisfying reward-system of capitalist society. If you cease to need money in order to live, and you derive life-satisfaction from the work you do with others to sustain your community and develop your own individual capacities, and you thus cease to desire money, you have freed yourself from the money-value system's power over you. By contrast, if you espouse revolutionary rhetoric but remain mired in a high-consumption lifestyle, you remain dominated by the ruling value system, regardless of the principles you espouse as abstract slogans.

It would be unfair to argue that this spiritual (in the sense defined above) and personal dimension of revolutionary theory is completely absent from the Marxist tradition. Marx himself certainly had no compunctions about defending socialist values in terms of the spiritual health of human beings alienated and exploited by capitalism. The real difference between Boggs and the best of the Marxist tradition is a matter of temporal priority, not justifying values. For Boggs, as for localists generally, change must be immediate, rather than mediated by a long revolutionary struggle, first for state power, then for social and economic transformation. The means of changing life are present to hand, according to Boggs, in the soils and structures abandoned by capital. Boggs affirms transformations on scales typically dismissed by Marxists as irrelevant to social change—a single person, or house, or vacant lot, or neighbourhood. What is more, Boggs is not concerned with formal structures of inter-linkage between local movements. For her, revolutionary change will emerge from a politically uncoordinated multiplication of local transformation projects. She explicitly rejects that which Marxists have typically taken to be essential: overarching political leadership. Like John Holloway, Boggs believes in changing the world *without* taking power.[8] “Our diversity is the source of our strength,” she argues. “We are not aiming simply to impact one election or one government. Rather, we are striving for long term sustainable transformation, and for that we need the wisdom that comes from many cultures, movements, and histories.”[9] Rather than integration and coordination by a central political intelligence, Boggs affirms the intelligence of multiplicity and experimentation.



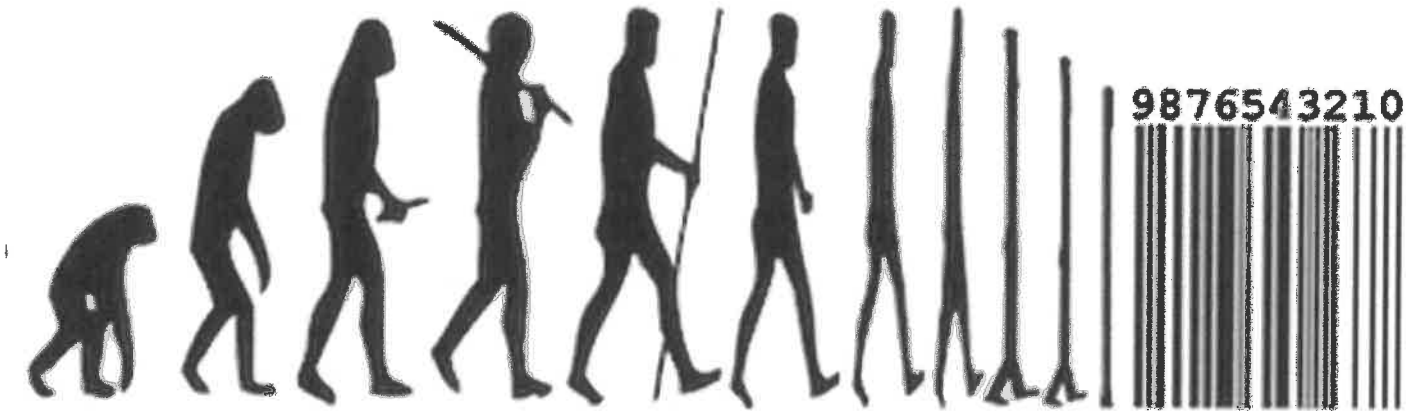
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[Credit: lifeaftersconsumerism.]

At the same time, there is a shared *foundation* to these local experiments: control over the satisfaction of the community's basic needs. This principle is exemplified in the urban farming movement, whose slogan, according to Boggs, is: "We cannot free ourselves until we feed ourselves." When people can feed themselves, then they "are empowered to make our own choices." [10] When people are materially empowered to make their own choices, they can no longer be dominated—politically, economically, culturally, intellectually, or morally, by the money-value system. Material self-sufficiency entails, therefore, moment to moment freedom from capitalist society, and moment to moment freedom from capitalist society allows people the freedom to determine their own lives on the model of reciprocal, mutualistic, and loving relationships. That which keeps the entire capitalist machine working is the structural dependency of people on labour and commodity markets for the means of their own survival and development. This socially constructed structural dependency creates tremendous barriers to the formation of revolutionary consciousness—workers have more to lose than their chains, they can lose their means of making a living. Contrary to Marxist expectations, this threat to livelihoods has not generally led to revolutionary consciousness, but rather deeper integration with the values of the system. People who believe that the only way to survive is to find a job will support parties that promise jobs—just look at any election cycle in any advanced capitalist country for evidence to support this claim. If, however, revolution means living a materially concrete alternative using ready-to-hand materials and existing labour—then (or so the localist argument goes) people are more easily motivated to embrace the alternative.

Let me now sum up the key principles of Boggs' version of the localist argument. The first principle is that life is lived in the here and now. The second principle, which follows from the first, is that changing the structural conditions of life means changing how one lives, materially and morally, in the here and now. The third principle thus maintains that there is no necessary role for a political party to play, mediating between the immediate life-conditions and consciousness of the so-called "masses" and their purported long-term interests in revolutionary change. The fourth principle, which draws out the practical implications of the first three, is that revolutionary change can be accomplished right now by seizing the already available means of self-sufficient production and *ignoring, by living apart from,* the technological-industrial means of capitalist production long thought necessary as the objective foundation for the successful construction of a socialist society. As is evident, this argument is internally

consistent and politically comprehensive, including everything formally necessary for a theoretical-practical model of revolutionary transformation. Whether it is capable of meeting the challenges that *capitalist society itself* puts in the way of its realization is the problem to which this investigation now turns.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/dia_pixgood.png)

[Credit: pixgood.]

II: Re-Routing Around Local Reclamation Projects: The Challenge of a Globally Mobile Value Disorder

The strength of Boggs' argument in particular (and localist experiments in democratic self-organization in general) is that they make life better right now, by reclaiming life-time and space from domination by the money-value system. Instead of awaiting the objective conditions for revolution to be present (potentially a waiting for Godot-type experience), localism works with the subjective need and desire for a set of life-affirmative social relations, creating what it can in the here and now while overcoming the market-induced psychology of consumer demand commodities that can only be obtained through monetary exchange. In the localist vision, revolution can be achieved by living *apart from* the institutions of capitalist society. If that vision is correct, then these institutions do not need to be overthrown because they can be *ignored*. But can they really be ignored?

Whether one's psyche is determined by the desire to succeed in capitalist labour and commodity markets or not, it remains a fact that in a globalized money-value economy the vast majority of the productive resources of the earth are either controlled by private corporations, allowed to be utilised by nominally sovereign states as if they were private corporate property, or are in danger of being wrested from public or communal control where title has not yet been formally ceded (as in the case of lands still controlled by indigenous communities). The exploitation of natural resources and human labour for the sake of money-value accumulation in the hands of the ruling class has generated massive environmental and social crises which one cannot escape through local self-organization. Nothing prevents a group of localist activists from starting a collective farm near a fracking operation, but the commitment of the activists to healthy organic food will not be sufficient to save the project if the fracking industry protected by the state pollutes the ground water. Nor will internal communal bonds be strong enough to resist expropriation or eviction if the state, in collusion with private capital, decides that the farm is

standing in the way of the so-called “economic growth” fracking will cause. The strength of localism—its small scale and disinterest in contesting for state power—is also its weakness—capital can re-route around it and continue thereby to cause the global problems that it causes. Alternatively, if local experiments succeed they themselves become money-valuable, making them a target for take-over. A community garden can be the catalyst for neighbourhood revitalisation, and neighbourhood revitalisation, in turn, a spur to higher real estate values. Higher real estate values can trigger gentrification, and gentrification will end up driving the original community activists out of the neighbourhood they recreated. Artists have long been the victims of the higher real estate values their life and work spaces generate in initially abandoned urban cores.[11] If, despite capital’s best efforts, the reclaimed space cannot be bought and threatens to become a real limit to capital, there is always the danger of eviction or expropriation. Occupy was a magnificent and unforeseen experiment in spontaneous direct democracy, but it could not withstand police violence once the state had had enough.[12]



(<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/pikgodot2.jpg>)

The problem with localism, therefore, is not that its values are not life-grounded, expressing the best of what the socialist movement has countered to the alienation and exploitation of capitalism: mutuality, conservation of scarce resources, recognition of the intrinsic life-value of other people, cooperation, non-violence, pluralism of vocation, democratic determination of the rules of collective life, and individual creativity. Rather, the problem is that scale in politics matters. Globalisation means that small-scale reclamation projects are never sufficient to disrupt the flows of money-capital that are the ultimate cause

of eco-systematic and social crisis. Given the fact that the capitalist “laws of supply and demand ... are indifferent to the real economy of providing life-goods otherwise in short supply,” they must ultimately be changed if the threat they pose to the provision of life goods *for all* is to be met and overcome.[13] Committed activists working in a neighbourhood can improve certain aspects of that neighbourhood—and that achievement should be celebrated. What they cannot do, if they are resolutely committed to the *locality*, is *institutionalise their gains at the national and international level*. Unless gains are institutionalised, they cannot pose a decisive challenge to the life-destructive money-sequence of value.[14] In Detroit, where some of the earliest and most successful examples of urban agriculture emerged, their success could not prevent the city—newly awash in capital eager to “redevelop” the city core— from cutting off thousands of poor African-American residents from the water system because they could not afford to pay their bills.[15] One can try to ignore state power, but it does not follow that state power will continue to ignore you, when and if there is money at stake.

Localism errs theoretically in so far as it fails to understand the dialectic of abandonment and reclamation that is essential to global capitalism. Positions such as the one Boggs develops see de-industrialization, ghettoization and other disasters of capital flight as permanent dis-economies that free space for localist reclamation projects. Evidence suggests, however, that if one extends the time frame, abandonment is an essential moment of later capital accumulation, which means that local reclamation projects are always in danger of being swallowed up by capitalist reclamation projects. This insight is central to David Harvey’s analysis of the function of cities in the global political economy. “Capitalism has periodically to break out of the constraints imposed by the world it has constructed. It is in mortal danger of becoming sclerotic. The building of a geographical landscape favourable to capital accumulation in one era becomes ... a fetter upon accumulation in the next. Capital has, therefore, to devalue much of the fixed capital in the existing geographical landscape in order to build a wholly new landscape in a different image. This sparks intense and destructive localised crises.”[16] Even the wholesale emptying of large sections of cities like Detroit does not, therefore, signal a crisis of the entire global system. If Harvey is correct (and the evidence suggests that he is), this localised crisis is essential to the overall health of the system (on its materially irrational terms), which constantly requires new spaces for investment. If the globe becomes too full, too developed, capital *must* destroy some of what has been accumulated in order to find new sinks for surplus money-value. So, in one era, the infamous Packard plant in Detroit was one of the top producing auto factories in the world. In another, it becomes a ruin, a destination for urban adventurers and a dreamscape for localists imagining how it could be repurposed to serve neighbourhood needs.[17] In a third (which is actually occurring right now), the possibility of local control is negated by its private purchase by a Peruvian real estate speculators.[18] As I noted above, local activists can inadvertently contribute to this dialectic of destruction and reconstruction by creating revitalised neighbourhoods that become attractive as sinks for ever-mobile capital. The actual dynamics of globally mobile capital means that it is impossible to defeat capital through piecemeal and uncoordinated projects which eschew the demand for *institutionalised change* to property relations and ruling value system.



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Marxists critics of localism are thus not being dogmatic when they insist on the need for coordination and unification of social movements and insisting that they contest for state power. As I will argue in the third section, the contest for state power need not take the form of militarised struggle, (as traditional vanguardist parties maintained). Nevertheless, a global system requires a global response. Mere addition of formally unrelated local experiments to capitalist society is not sufficient to fundamentally alter the property relations and ruling value system. Even if these local experiments operate outside (as far as possible) the money-economy, they do not contest its legitimacy, but only avoid being determined by it in their internal operations. Outside of these small-scale projects, everything continues as usual: pollution, growing inequality, capture of the state by money-value, destruction of public institutions, slashing of the social wage, and rampaging inequality undermining even the pretense of democratic self-governance. Greg Sharzer makes this point well in a recent critique of localism: "This is the crux of the issue: do post-capitalist alternatives only provide a different way of living for participants, or can they confront capitalism? ... These schemes face limits from the market and only succeed by adopting its principles or finding non-market forms of support through donation or the free labour of their

supporters. Relying on people with free time and money makes it very unlikely that these schemes will grow.”[19] In fact, relying on donation and free labour makes these post-capitalist projects perversely dependent upon a “healthy” capitalism. In order to have money to donate, one must have money, and in order to have money, one must either work (in the capitalist economy), or be independently wealthy. None of this impugns in any way the ethical integrity of committed activists trying to build a life-valuable alternative economy right now. It only points out the structural limits a globally mobile money-value system poses to their success. As Sharzer, defending his argument in an interview argues: “People who want to make their lives better by growing their own food or meeting their neighbours should do so ... It’s not a question of whether cooperatives are possible—clearly they are—or whether they can make life better for some workers—clearly they can. The resilience and creativity of social enterprises are not in question: their capacity to serve as a base for anti-capitalist organizing is.”[20] They cannot serve as a basis of anti-capitalist organizing so long as they remain uncoordinated and unconcerned with state power.

It is true that one cannot infer from the class composition of the ruling power the value system they will serve. That is, there is no reason to believe that a government of the working class will be able to solve all problems caused by the various histories of oppression that mark the capitalist era (racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism) or be willing to take the steps necessary to drastically curtail the consumption of natural resources and the production of toxic waste, *just because they are workers*. Boggs and other localists are therefore correct to insist upon personal value transformation as a variable that is independent of class but essential if fundamental social problems are to be resolved. At the same time, if social movements remain indifferent to state power, they cut themselves off from crucial means of self-defense and institutionalization crucial for the consolidation of gains and the generation of a dynamic, virtuous circle of dynamic of life-valuable transformation. In Spain, where a right-wing government currently rules, protests in front of parliament have been made illegal. In Greece, despite the severe challenges it is facing right now, Syriza permitted competing demonstrations on the eve of the European Union’s decision on its compromise economic proposals. This difference is not inconsiderable. In fact, it is the difference between the possibility of democratic transformation that the localists affirm and the need to resort to more potentially violent means of struggle they purportedly abhor.



(<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/prisstephaniemcmillan1.jpg>)

[Credit: Stephanie McMillan.]

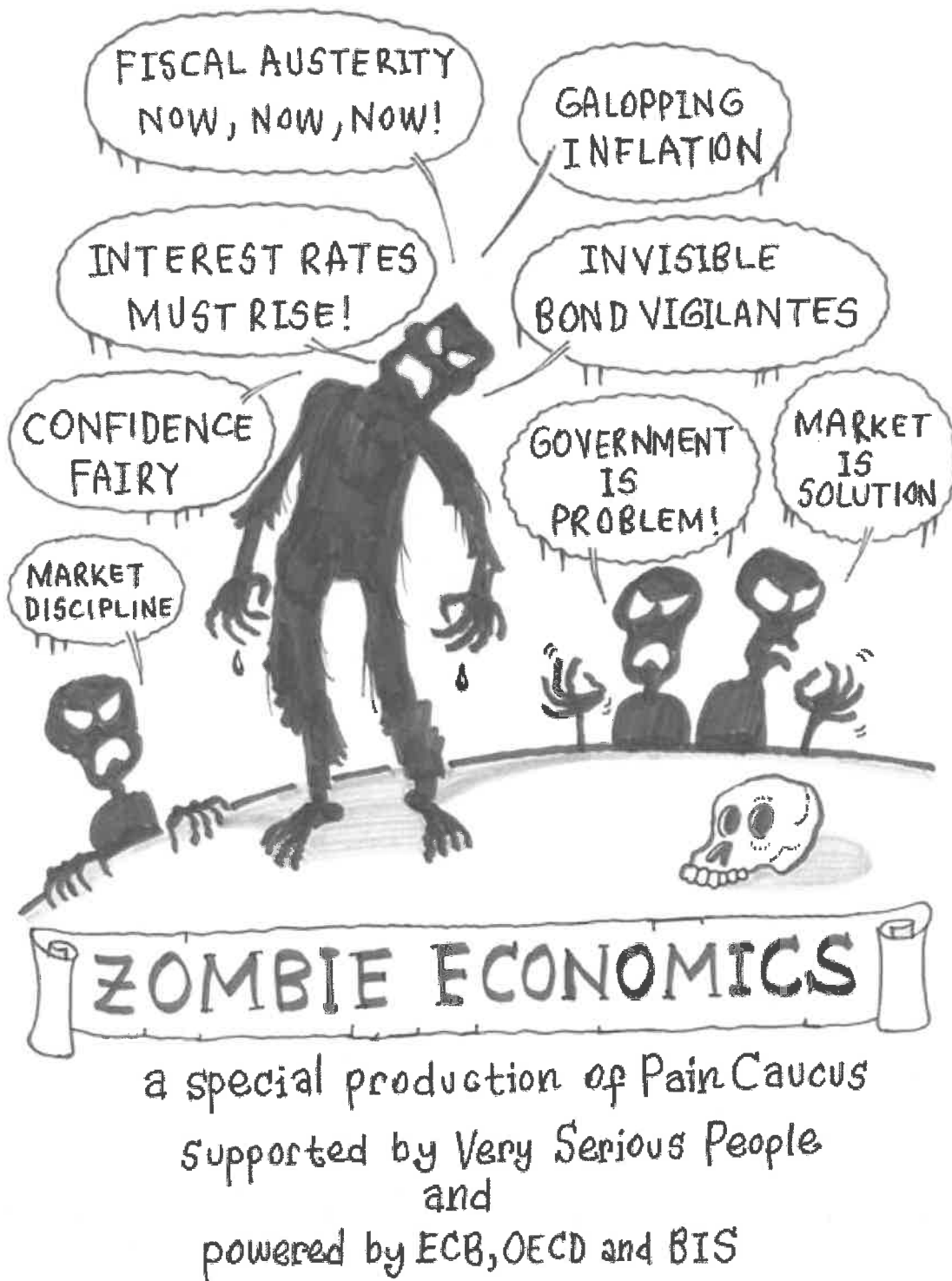
Social change can of course begin with small, local experiments. Juliet B. Schor is right to remind those who despair about the possibilities of local projects having global effects that the Industrial Revolution began with a few bold pioneers employing exotic technologies in ways that could not be fully understood at the time. "If starting an economic revolution from individuals and small-scale activities sounds unrealistic, it is worth remembering that that the first industrial revolution in Britain developed in just this manner. What became powerhouse companies ... began from individual craftspeople working on a small scale, in workshops and homes." [21] What Schor does not add, but needs to, is that the industrial revolution was preceded by a century or more of class struggle in which the peasantry of

England was driven off the land, a new ruling class came to power, and used the institutions of the state to make the legal changes the legitimation of proletarianization required.[22] The stress on the importance of state power is not in contrast to the practical value of do it yourself experiments in alternative ways of living, but rather in contrast to the principled position *against* holding state power as a necessary condition of social transformation. Eventually, the question of which value system—money or life-capital, rules—will have to be posed and answered. At the level of social institutions, the question of which value system will rule is answered in the language of property relations, productive and distributive priorities, the missions of public institutions, and the legal frameworks which legitimate and protect them all.

Unfortunately for localism, the only conclusion consistent with the historical evidence is that one can change oneself and one's neighbourhood, but not the world, without taking power. The reason is straightforward—if too many people and too many neighbourhoods reject the money-value system, the class that serves the money-value system will begin to deploy state power against those changes. At that point, localists will have to fight that state power, or give up their experiments. It does not follow, however, that in countries where the battle for democracy has already been won that these struggles need to be violent on the model of early twentieth century revolutions. The ruling class has typically been willing to use overwhelming violence to defend itself, but there are many examples of revolutionary change taking place through mass mobilization but little to no violence on the part of the revolutionaries. Indian independence and the overthrow of the Soviet Union are the most obvious examples. So, if the concern of localists is with the violent degeneration that undermined twentieth century revolutions, it all the more important for them to affirm the need to build mass democratic parties committed to life-valuable strategies and tactics of gaining power and changing institutions. To not work to build the new kinds of national parties needed to catalyze systemic change, localism leaves itself—and everyone else outside the ruling class—vulnerable to state violence. David Harvey's warning needs to be taken seriously: "Oligarchic capitalist class privilege and power is taking the world in a similar direction everywhere. Political power backed by intensifying surveillance, policing, and militarised violence is being used to attack the well-being of whole populations deemed expendable and disposable." [23] Combatting this global life-destruction requires more than promissory notes; it requires building on the achievements and intelligence of past struggles.

Marxist critics of localism like Sharzer are often guilty of the problem of tactical vagueness on the crucial question of what institutions a transitional society will employ. When pressed, they tend to affirm the creativity of people in struggle, and then cite examples of practices that already exist. Here is Sharzer invoking the recent Egyptian revolution: "socialism involves the vast majority of people planning their collective future, going through tremendous struggle and upheaval. This is the crucible of revolution, which teaches people to cooperate in new ways. For example, in the Egyptian revolution of January, 2011, demonstrators organized security, food distribution, childcare, and medical care on their own." [24] The first and second parts of the argument are in tension with each other. On the one hand, we are told that socialism involves "tremendous upheavals" which teach people to cooperate in "new ways." On the other hand, the examples that he cites of these new ways are not, in fact, new, but very old, ancient, in fact, forms of communal cooperation and self-provisioning—the very principles that localists turn to as the *material mediation between the old and a new society*. My point is that the institutions that we need to effect global transformation already exist: first, in the life-affirmative labour (of child care, of food production and distribution, of education, of cultural creation) that has always been the source of the meaning and value of life, and second, in the "civil commons" institutions and practices through which these life-goods have been and/or are distributed on the basis of need for them.[25] The

problem, therefore, is not so much one of having to invent new practices and institutions, but to more universally institutionalize the already legitimate principles of life-requirement satisfaction for the sake of life-capacity realization in a democratic and ecologically healthy society.



(<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/dyszom1.jpg>)

III: Anti-Austerity, Democracy, and Life-Capital

The global mobility of capital means that the localities in which people live their lives are constantly enmeshed in new relationships. Four hundred years ago, Guangzhou and Long Beach California had

nothing to do with each other. Now, the jobs of workers at the Port of Los Angeles depend upon the arrival of container ships transporting the output of the massive factories of the coastal cities of southern China. The day to day lived experiences of the Chinese and American workers are primarily shaped by local conditions, but any fundamental changes to the social structures in which those local forces operate would require global coordination. Given the fact that global forces shape local conditions, anticapitalist struggles must be, as Alan Sears argues, local and global at once: "Anti-capitalism has always existed simultaneously as a global and a local politics, with a history that needs to be understood at different levels (global, national, local). The global nature of capitalism, the centrality of migration and the impact of internationalism within the left have meant that local experiences are not lied in isolation, even if their specific circumstances and histories make for sharply divergent practices and tendencies.[26] Mediating the locality in which life is lived and the global forces shaping that concrete environment are the political and social institutions of the nation state. A politics that is adequate to the dialectical relationship between the local and the global must be a national politics working to forge international alliances that progressively close off the escape routes of money-capital.

Globalization has not in any way made the nation state obsolete; the nation state is the regulator of globalization in so far as the terms of access to national markets are determined by the sovereign institutions of government of each nation state. That point in no way means that these sovereign institutions cannot be shaped by global forces to conform their terms of access to the demands of global money-capital. Globalization can be understood, economically, as the intensification of the power of mobile capital to dictate terms to national governments. The events in Greece are a case study in the weakness of *isolated* national governments to resist the demands of international finance capital. At the same time, Syriza is *also* an example of a new political formation: a democratic party of the radical left in the heart of the capitalist world committed to the principle of pluralism and electoral contestation of power but guided by a platform which, if ever implemented, would lead Greece toward a socialist future.



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The moment to moment struggles of Syriza to re-negotiate the terms of the deadly austerity demands of the European Central bank are not my main concern here. Rather, my interest is in the principle that Syriza represents and the way that principle can inform a new political practice on the anti-capitalist, pro-democratic socialist left. That principle is: the case for socialism as an ethically, economically, politically, socially, and culturally superior system to capitalism can be made through argument and put into practice using the existing political institutions of capitalist society. That is not to say that socialism is compatible with all existing institutions (clearly, private property in the universal requirements of life-support and development is not compatible with the socialist principle that life-resources are to be used to satisfy life-requirements and enable life-capacities). Rather, it is to say that property relations can be changed through legislation and enforcement of that legislation that existing political institutions have the legitimate power to enact and enforce. Greek voters not only repudiated austerity when they elected Syriza, they elected a party whose very name—“Union of Radical Left Forces” and its official platform is a repudiation of the money-value system.[27] Of course, not everyone who voted for Syriza accepts the full implications of their platform. On the other hand, its name and origins and program were not frightening enough to prevent people from voting for them. Whatever the success or lack of success in this particular phase of Syriza’s struggle against austerity, the principle it has established is a lesson for socialists across the advanced capitalist world: democratic parties of the far left can win elections. Elections confer legitimate power. Majority support for a party of the far left lends moral support to the *de jure* power election confers. An alliance of the parliamentary party and extra-parliamentary social movement mobilization can exert real counter-power against money capital, not only squeezing it out of a small local space, but cutting off its influence over national institutions, disrupting its ability to dictate terms. Such a process has been occurring (not without challenges and contradictions) in South America for over a decade. As Harvey notes, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador demonstrate that “the art of writing progressive constitutions as the basis for regulating human life is by no means dead.” [28] To a small but real extent, these countries have reclaimed some of their life-resources from the control of global money-capital and put them to work satisfying their citizens real life-needs.

Unfortunately, the counter-argument to this position seems obvious: progressive constitutions and party programs do not solve social problems on their own. Syriza was forced to attenuate its transformational demands in order to gain power, and even after this shift it has not cut off money-capital’s influence over Greece, but has been forced to make concession after concession. This counter-argument is sound, but not decisive. The problem Syriza is facing at the moment is isolation. In order to succeed, it needs its allies like Podemos in Spain to win power. Let us imagine what might happen if Podemos follows its success in municipal elections with success in national elections. If that were to happen, and it maintains a principled anti-austerity position, the European Central bank would now be confronted with a G-7 member demanding an end to austerity. Greece can be threatened with expulsion from the Euro-zone, Spain cannot. An alliance between Spain and Greece would have to be listened to—the ability of finance capital to dictate terms would be seriously compromised. If the ability of finance capital to dictate terms were compromised, *and lives demonstrably improved as a consequence*, a powerful argument for the practical superiority of anti-austerity parties of the left would be available for other, now much smaller socialist parties (like Die Linke in Germany) to use in their struggles for political power.



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/dia_westminster-ac-uk.jpg)

[Credit: westminster.ac.uk.]

At the same time, it is true that a politics of anti-austerity is not identical to a socialist politics. One can fight austerity in capitalist (Keynesian) terms—a problem in fact raised by localists like Boggs. While this problem is real, if one looks to the underlying principle of anti-austerity, and not the policy mix or compromises that are tactically adopted moment to moment, a deep connection between anti-austerity and socialism becomes clear. What is it that the anti-austerity movement is “anti” to: the life-destruction austerity has caused. To cite only the Greek case, a comprehensive study of the health-effects of austerity has found that austerity has nearly destroyed the public health care system, impeding access to even basic medical care, led to a dramatic rise in drug use and HIV infections, and an escalating suicide rate.[29] To be anti-life-destruction is logically equivalent to being pro-life, in the political sense of in favour of the use of life-resources to satisfy life-requirements for the sake of the free realization, in ecologically coherent ways, of the life-capacities whose enjoyment makes human existence meaningful and good. Thus, the connective tissue linking anti-austerity and a life-valuable and life-coherent socialism is *life-capital*. As McMurtry argues, “the moving line of the war of liberation begins with what we are able to control, our own lives. Here we can recognise that every value we enjoy, lose, or gain has a bottom line—its life-capital, that is, the life wealth that produces more life-wealth without loss and with cumulative gain. We defend it by life-goods to ensure our life-capacities are not reduced but gain through time.”[30] Life capital takes both natural (water, oxygen, nutritious food, the beauty of natural spaces) and social (free public education, libraries, health care) forms. That which is essential to it is that, unlike the growth of the money sequence in capitalist society, its growth is necessarily sustainable over time. Life capital—life that produces more life—*must* by its very nature, include understanding of the material limits which, if exceeded disable rather than enable the growth and development of life. Hence, tailoring policy, law, and public institutions to these conditions *ensures* that the human species and all its members can continue to flourish in individually meaningful ways over the open horizon of the human future.

That which can *never* be ensured, and which therefore requires constant political engagement and argument, is peoples' capacity to *see* this life-capital at work in their own lives. Austerity and neo-liberalism all count on people continuing to mistake money-capital for life-capital, identifying their interests with the former, and supporting policies which allow money-capital to grow at the expense of life-capital. The genius of localism is to recognize the existence of life-capital in spaces abandoned by money-capital; its limitation is that it overlooks the need for national and international institutions to stop the destructive flow of money-capital and re-channel it to serve life-valuable purposes. That re-channeling requires, in addition to good ideas, good will, and committed effort, means of financing and protecting life-valuable alternatives. If Greece, for example, has access to an alternative finance system (like the Bank of the South, created as an alternative to the IMF and the World Bank by Venezuela and allied governments in South America) whose mandate was to use money-capital as a means of advancing life-valuable projects, on terms that could be repaid without bankrupting the nation, they could simply walk away from their debt obligations to the European central bank.[31] But no amount of local gardening is going to save the Greek banking system if the European banks cut them off, which is why Syriza has been forced to compromise. The collapse of the banks would mean the loss of Greek citizens' savings and what is left of their pensions. Localism is correct—freedom from capitalism means freedom from material dependency on capitalist markets. Freedom from dependency on capitalist markets requires control over national and international money-capital flows, and that control cannot be established without control over national and international political and economic institutions.

Still, work towards that control can begin at the local level. Not only are people's lives improved in the here and now, they can also gain the political confidence now lacking in the left (after forty years of defeats) to re-imagine the organizational forms, strategies, and tactics by which its values can be advanced. The vulnerability of local projects to expropriation proves the need for political parties that can win power at the national level. The weakness of Syriza in relation to international and European institutions demonstrates the need for an alternative international financial system. However, political development does not move from abstract principle to global realization, but from local struggles that inspire others and demonstrate the reality of people's desire and capacity to live in more life-affirmative and mutualistic way. But if it is to become the embryo of a new world, local projects must coordinate, synthesise, and contest for national power, and national parties must then replicate that process at the international level. Gradually, over time, money-capital will find no safe haven, and be forced to return to what it originally was— people's life-energy at work building a human world out of the givenness of raw nature.



https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/dia_jacobinmag.jpg

[Credit: jacobinmag.]

End notes:

[1] Grace Lee Boggs, with Scott Kurashige, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-first Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2012, (197).

[2] Leon Trotsky, "The Testament of Leon Trotsky." <http://www.marxist.com/testament-of-leon-trotsky.htm> (<http://www.marxist.com/testament-of-leon-trotsky.htm>) (accessed, June 17th, 2015).

[3] David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2014, p. 1.

[4] Boggs and Kurashige, *op. cit.*, p.195

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 88

[8] John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, (London: Pluto Press), 2005.

[9] Boggs and Kurashige, *op. cit.*, p.131.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116

[11] David Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, (London: Verso), 2012, p.14.

[12] See, Jeff Noonan, "After Occupy," *Philosophers for Change*, <https://philosophersforchange.org/2013/03/14/after-occupy/> (<https://philosophersforchange.org/2013/03/14/after-occupy/>) (Accessed June 26th, 2015).

[13] John McMurtry, "Breaking Out of the Invisible Prison: The Ten-Point Global Paradigm Revolution," *The Bullet*, <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1085.php> (<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1085.php>) (Accessed, Jun3 18th, 2015).

[14] The money sequence of value is schematised by McMurtry as: \$-means of life-\$¹ Unpacked, it means that the normal investment cycles of capitalism turn means of life into money to be appropriated by private money-owners. Iterated repeatedly across the globe, it has progressively undermined the life-support and life-development capacities of ecosystems and social institutions. John McMurtry, *Philosophy and World Problems Volume 1: What is Good? What is Bad? The Value of all Values Across Times, Places, and Theories*, (Oxford: EOLSS Publishers), 2011, p. 25.

[15] Mary M. Chapman, "Detroit Shuts Off Water to Residents but not to Businesses Who owe Million," *The Daily Beast*, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/26/detroit-shuts-off-water-to-residents-but-not-to-businesses-who-owe-millions.html> (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/26/detroit-shuts-off-water-to-residents-but-not-to-businesses-who-owe-millions.html>) (Accessed, June 22nd, 2015).



(https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/dia_galleryhomeland-org.jpg)

[Credit: galleryhomeland.org.]

[16] Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, p. 155.

[17] Boggs and Kurashige, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

[18] ABC News Detroit, "Detroit's Packard Plant owner Fernando Palazuelo Shares his Vision for Long Neglected Property," <http://www.wxyz.com/news/detroits-packard-plant-owner-shares-his-vision> (<http://www.wxyz.com/news/detroits-packard-plant-owner-shares-his-vision>) (Accessed, June 3rd, 2015).

[19] Greg Sharzer, *No Local*, (Winchester, UK: Zero Books), 2012, p. 147.

[20] Greg Sharzer and Jordy Cummings, "The Contradictions of Localism," *The Bullet*, No. 937, February 17th, 2014. <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/937.php> (<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/937.php>) (Accessed, June 2nd, 2015).

[21] Judith B. Schor, *Plenitude*, (New York: The Penguin Press), 2010, p. 157.

[22] The literature on the transition from feudalism to capitalism in England is voluminous and explanations contested. The best short account, to my mind, is Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," *The Brenner Debate*, T.H. Ashton and C.H.E. Philpin, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1988, pp. 10-64. The volume also has the merit of including critical commentary and alternative accounts, sufficient to get the historical amateur oriented towards the wider literature should she or he desire to pursue the issue. The historical-theoretical debates are also superbly summarised in Ellen Meiskins Wood, *The Origins of Capitalism: A Longer View*, (London: Verso), 2002.

[23] Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, p. 292.

[24] Sharzer, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

[25] See John McMurtry, *The Cancer Stage of Capitalism: New Edition*, (London: Pluto Press), 2013, pp. 237-8.

[26] Alan Sears, *The Next New Left*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing), 2014, p. 23.

[27] G. Dragasakis, "The Economic Program of SYRIZA-EKM," *The Bullet*, No. 653, June 12th, 2012. <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/653.php> (<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/653.php>) (Accessed, May 11th, 2015).

[28] Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, p. 284.

[29] David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu, *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills*, (New York: Harper Collins), 2013, pp. 77-94.

[30] McMurtry, "Breaking Out of the Invisible Prison: The Ten-Point Global Paradigm Revolution."

[31] Stephen Lendman, "The Bank of The South an Alternative to IMF and World Bank Dominance," *Global Research*, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-bank-of-the-south-an-alternative-to-imf-and-world-bank-dominance/7207> (<http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-bank-of-the-south-an-alternative-to-imf-and-world-bank-dominance/7207>) (Accessed, Jun 20th, 2015).



[/dia_pinterest.jpg](https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/07) (<https://philoforchange.files.wordpress.com/2015/07>

[/dia_pinterest.jpg](#))

[Credit: pinterest.]

[Thank you indeed Jeff for this contribution. Lead graphic: Fernando Vicente.]

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JULY 21, 2015**JULY 21, 2015** **SANJAY PERERA****# CAPITAL AS POWER**, **# CLASS STRUGGLE**,
DIALECTICS, **# GLOBALIZATION**, **# GRACE LEE BOGGS**, **# JEFF NOONAN**, **# LIFE CAPITAL**,
LIFE FORMS, **# LIFE VALUABLE**, **# LIFE-COHERENT**, **# LIFE-VALUE**, **# LOCALISM**, **# NATURAL**
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