

# INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE



Capitalism has no future...  
**BUT WE DO !**

- The Struggles In France
- Latin America Turns Left
- Software and Revolution
- Necessity and Possibility of Revolution
- Debate On 'Human Nature'

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

## Contact Addresses

Write only as shown below :

Destryker  
BP 22  
1310 La Hulpe  
**BELGIUM**

AM  
P.O. Box 40231  
S.I., New York 10304  
**U.S.A.**

PO Box 47643  
Don Mills, ON, M3C 3S7  
**CANADA**

**Email** us at : [ip@internationalist-perspective.org](mailto:ip@internationalist-perspective.org)

Visit our **website** at <http://internationalist-perspective.org>

Editor : F. Destryker, 12b Ave du Beau Site La Hulpe Dépôt Bruxelles X

# Life is Cheap

Life is cheap these days. That's nothing new, you might say, but it seems to be getting cheaper by the minute. While these lines are being written, a car-bomb explodes near a busy market, a child steps on a landmine, a mine collapses on workers, someone kills himself, someone is tortured to death... and so on and on and on.

The cheapening of life is not just an impression; it is literally true and measurable. The global average value of living labor is falling. Competing on a world-scale, the commodity labor power has the disadvantage of being massively overproduced. Close to two billion people are unemployed and many others do tasks that could easily be done by machines, if the labor were not so dirt-cheap. Thanks to new technology, capital has more access than ever to cheap labor and can play off workers of different countries against each other, so that they all lose and labor becomes even cheaper. And life with it.

The law of value rules the world and people internalize it. The rich define themselves by 'how much they're worth,' and even the poor link their self-esteem to their value on the labor market. For the many cast out of this market, it is hard to stay strong, hard to maintain their sense of self-worth. Even if they get (more or less) the means to survive, they, like anybody, want to believe that their life has meaning. And that is very difficult in a society where all meaning comes from money, from value, from playing a role in its accumulation and expansion, from being a good commodity.

In places like Gaza, the West Bank, and Iraq more than half the population is unemployed. There are other countries where that is the case, but these countries have something else in common: they are occupied, the surest sign that they are at a point of conflict between capitals. These are, in essence, disputes over real estate, possession, capital. They are asymmetrical: one side in these conflicts enjoys a vast technological advantage. The other's only recourse is the cheapness of life.

This cheapness makes it possible for capitals disguised as political movements to penetrate the local labor markets and hire unemployed youths to become militants, soldiers, bomb fodder. A cheap investment, but the key to success



is marketing: using the local religion to construct a new meaning of life for the despairing, a new pride for the self-loathing. The goals of these enterprises are clear. They seek control over towns, over institutions, to squeeze profit out of them and use them as a lever to gain more control, more real-estate, a state. Profit is in the driver's seat, not religion. They seek lebensraum ('living space'), as Hitler put it.

Capital's urge for lebensraum comes to the fore when its contradictions do so too: when overcapacity and a decline of the general rate of profit disrupt the rhythm of reproduction and capitals increasingly look to alternative ways to turn value into more value. Each one uses the means at its disposal. For the strongest capital, the US, these means involve controlling global markets where the playing field is tilted to its monopolistic advantage, controlling the movement of money so that the bulk of the world's savings flow to it. That requires the use of its technological-military superiority, the demonstration of its capacity to enforce its rule. That's why the US three years ago, with the backing of both its alternating ruling parties, invaded Iraq. The occasion - the jingoistic climate fueled by the 11 September attacks, the military weakness and isolation of Iraq, a strategically crucial country - was just too sweet to let go by.

For weaker capitals, an alternative way to turn value into more value is an investment in ethnic cleansing as Sudan

has done in Darfur and which has taken place in so many other countries in recent years. It's not a risky investment for Sudan: as long as it cooperates with the US against its enemies, it can pretty much go ahead and empty Darfur. It's a bit more risky to attack the US in Iraq with the goal of grabbing power when it's gone. But the stakes are high given the potential oil-profits, and the diminishing support for the war in the US, makes it seem that the goal is not entirely impossible. Many local capitalists, oil men and others, give money under the table to opposing sides in Iraq, just like big companies give money to both parties in the US: you never know who's going to win. These enterprises get the money they need for their struggle and they get the cannon fodder too. The key to that is to connect to the feelings of the discarded masses, judged valueless by the global production process, to sell them a story in which they become valuable again. They do so, for their employers, not by producing but by destroying. Thus the story must be based on rendering the object of destruction, the enemy, valueless.

To organize and sustain war, capital needs to demonize the enemy, to make him feared, hated and despised. The more capitalism's crisis intensifies, the more its politics nurture ideologies based on the rejection of the other. Each capital seeks only its own lebensraum, but in doing so it acts as an agent for the global capital, for whom more lebensraum necessarily involves reducing global overcapacity in an orgy of global destruction. So the poisonous ideologies that serve this purpose are pushed: Rejection of immigrants. Rejection of Arabs. Rejection of Americans. Tensions are fanned between Shia and Sunni, between Muslims and Christians and so on. Crises are created artificially to stoke the flames. The protests against the Danish cartoons about Mohammed for instance. For six months they provoked no reaction, then somebody pushes a button and they break out all over the world. Another button explodes a bomb in a Shia mosque and the Shia and Sunni go after each other. In Washington, a political bomb exploded over the sale of a company managing logistics in

six US ports to an Arab company. A routine deal that would have gone unnoticed if it did not present such a choice occasion to fan the rejection of the other and score political points at the same time. No wonder a *Washington Post* poll indicated a sudden rise in fear and distrust of Middle-Easterners afterwards. Mission Accomplished.

None of those incidents was spontaneous. It also seems probable that, to a greater or lesser extent, they left the vast majority of people where they occurred either indifferent or scared and worried. But that is no reassurance. The events in places like Bosnia have shown that even when most people do not support war and its ideologies at the outset, they can be swept along in a dynamic of violence and counter-violence set in motion by determined minorities, armed and financed by capital. This can only be prevented by the self-organization of the only social force capable of resisting the destructive course capitalism is dragging society into: the working class.

That's why we say yes! to the militancy of the public transportation workers in New York, breaking capitalist law to fight against the attacks on pensions and health care of all workers; yes! to the anger of the unemployed, rioting in France and of students and workers there fighting a new law that makes it easier to fire young workers; yes! to the thousands of social protests in China. These are the flames that we want to fan into a firestorm because from such acts of class resistance, as flawed as they still may be, a different story can emerge: an understanding of the world not based on fear and rejection of the other but on the common interest of all of humanity, on the necessity and possibility to replace this mad destructive global system that reduces the value of people's lives to nothing, by one that truly cherishes life by kicking profit out of the driver's seat and making the satisfaction of human needs the goal of human society.

## INTERNATIONIST PERSPECTIVE

*Internationalist Perspective has a new web site*

After a major reorganization, the new Internationalist Perspective web site is now online at  
**<http://internationalist-perspective.org>**

Like the old site, the new version is divided into both English and French pages but is now in a style which is easier to navigate. The site contains the most recent issues of our magazine (we hope to post back issues soon), as well as pages devoted to texts which have not been published in hard copy, discussions in IP and links of interest.

It is important to stress that we do not see this site as solely "our" property, and hope that readers will take the time to respond to posted articles and participate in our debates.

# A NEW SPRING

Since February 2006, French students have mobilized against a key governmental measure, the First Hiring Contract, which envisages, according to the French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, the possibility of reducing youth unemployment, whose rate in 2006 (23%) is far higher than the overall unemployment rate (approximately 9%). The first hiring contract (CPE) will apply to all those under 26 years of age. Contrary to what its name indicates, an employee can be included under its provisions even if it is not his/her first job. Under the CNE (New Recruiting Contract), the provisions of the law will apply for a period of two years, during which the employer can terminate the employment contract without having to provide reasons for dismissal.

At the beginning of February, in a common call, organizations of young people created a collective against the CPE. These students define the CPE as a sanction for "insecure" employment. They estimate, rightly, that the contract will facilitate abusive dismissals and insecurity. The movement started relatively spontaneously, and was then latched onto by the left and the trade unions. The movement started with mobilizations of students in the large French cities. Tuesday February 7, 2006, 700.000 people demonstrated their opposition to the CPE. Certain universities, like the Universities of Rennes II and Paris III, saw their students go on strike. The movement then began to grow. The students organized "general assemblies" in the amphitheatres of the universities. In several, they voted to prevent the holding of courses.

On March 10, dozens of universities (a total of 84 according to the student movement) were affected or occupied following votes in "General Assemblies" in the amphitheatres. The universities of Toulouse-II Le Mirail, Rennes-II, Montpellier-II and III, Nice-Sophia-Antipolis UFR of Nice and Valbonne and the campus of Nice Ville II were all occupied. On the night of the 10 to the 11, the Sorbonne was evacuated by the police force before the end of the third night of its occupation by students demanding the rescinding of the law, the CPE. The Sorbonne, a part of the square and the adjacent streets, has been closed by the CRS [the Security Police] since March 11. Roving actions have also been organized, like the blocking of trains (Nantes), or expressways (Rennes, Nice).

On March 17, the government sought "to renew the dialogue" and to "improve" the CPE through discussion. It sought to include the unions, but they refused to negotiate as long as the CPE was not rescinded. On Saturday, March 18, a day national protest took place with 1,5 million demonstrators according to the CGT union, with marches in 160 towns in France. Clashes with the police force occurred at the end of the demonstration in Paris.



A general strike across France took place on March 28. Strike notices were put up by the trade unions for April 4 calling for demonstrations throughout France. At the end of March, president Chirac publicly intervened in support of the measures of his Prime Minister. The movement continues.

These events must be situated in a general context of the crisis of the capitalist system. The transition of capitalism towards a post-Fordist society reflects the progress of capital. And yet this progress has been bought at the price of a horrible social regression. The continuation of the existence of capitalist civilization and of a mode of production based on the operation of the law of the value leads the human species to devastation on a scale never before seen in history. The economic crisis cannot be managed, and the insecurity of ever-larger sectors of the population, globally entails war, destruction, famine, and, even in the most industrialized countries, the absence of a viable future for many young people. If these student struggles express the reactions of the unemployed of the future, the CPE institutionalizes the fall in wages, and that concerns the whole of the working class. The bourgeoisie, confronted with the reality of globalization, tries to reorganize the labor market. The shifting of productive activities to zones where the value of labor power is lower necessitates a reorganization of the labor market and the opening up of other sectors, utilizing different workers, adaptable, pliable... entailing for workers as a whole an increased insecurity.

The determined reactions of young people also express their dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of the forms of teaching, and the very structures of education. The crisis and the effects of post-Fordism disturb the basic function of schools, which have increasing difficulty in transmitting any kind of meaning to the acquisition of new knowledge, "competence" simply allowing an unspecified insertion in



a world of production, or non-production for the unemployed, the sole point of which is the valorization of capital. The school, which functions as the site for the reproduction of the social and cultural values of the bourgeoisie, is also confronted with the effects of the transformations of post-Fordism and has ever-greater difficulty in carrying out its traditional role. Today, there is a gap between the institutions that teach the population at large, and the specialized institutions (the so-called "Grandes Ecoles," the ENA, the ENS) reserved for the future elites of France's state apparatus.

The movement expresses a reaction against the logic of capitalism, the prospect of a generalized insecurity, the necessity for exploitation, wars, an exacerbation of poverty. It is against this logic that the movement is directed, instantiating the expression of a desire for change, though one that remains fuzzy as to its precise demands. This movement thus expresses the lack of perspective for youth. It is obvious that it is not a simply a question of asking for an unspecified right to live "with dignity". The demands, which appeared spontaneously, are quite succinct: NO to the CPE, and its institutionalization of insecurity. These elements highlight the reality of an increasingly obvious dysfunction of society and also clearly express the absence of any adherence to the alternative "solutions" of the left.

This time, the working class has reacted and transformed the very terms in which the struggle is being waged, forcing the unions to reveal themselves by overtly seeking to contain the movement, and preventing its generalization

to other sectors. If the possibility of a generalization to the working class were possible at the beginning of the movement, the unions have been able to recuperate themovement, transforming it into a political expression of the left/right opposition, with the next presidential election (2007) as a backdrop. This is also what can explain the intransigent reaction of the current, right, French government, which is sticking to its guns. This situation thus unleashes state violence, the power of the French bourgeoisie utilizing a democratic discourse, in the justification of a new attack against the standard of living of the workers. Without a reaction of the working class, the bourgeoisie can let the situation deteriorate, putting the spotlight on the violence of fringe-elements, accentuating the insecurity even more.

Riots in the suburbs, generalization of the student movement, increasing strikes, the social climate is profoundly changed and opens up the perspective for breaching the social dikes that capitalism has constructed. The reactions of French youth presage a new spring.

April 1

**FD**

# Let's Speak Out!

***Everything is being done to prevent us from meeting.***

***The priority is the creation, everywhere, of places where we can come together and meet !***

Why are we struggling? Just for the rescinding of the CPE? To beg the right to be a modern slave, subject to a life of "metro-work-tele-sleep" with a contract of "undetermined length"?

The CPE is only an advanced expression of the capitalist logic where humans only exist if they add to the profits of capital. This logic leads to the generalisation of insecurity for the exploited. It means subjecting the youngest of us to the most humiliating conditions for being hired in all of the developed world. It is the same logic that means that today a child on the planet dies every four seconds, that war kills millions of civilians just about everywhere in the world. Again, it is this logic which is leading the Earth to the brink of an irreversible ecological disaster.

It is this infernal logic that must be broken. Breaking it involves the generalisation of the idea that the political parties of the left and the trade unions of all kinds, which claim to represent and defend the exploited, are totally situated within the logic of capitalism and only seek to manage, and in the end, uphold this system. Under their direction any struggle is condemned to impotence.

Don't forget that the failure of the huge mobilisation for the struggle in France, in 2003, against the reform of pensions and of education was only possible thanks to the clever cooperation between the government and the trade union bosses. In this respect the newspaper "Le Monde" reported on June 17 2003: "The minister [Fillon] is grateful to the centre of Montreuil [the CGT union] for striving to prevent the generalisation of a movement which risked escaping its control".

The problem is not in itself the shameful behaviour of these cynical and manipulative bureaucrats. The problem is how to assert our power, our will against all those who undermine our determination. It is not easy to learn to organise ourselves on our own, without any control except that of our assemblies, but as the current experience of college and high school students shows it is possible.

It is clear that workers have a greater weight in society than students, given that it is thanks to them that society

functions. It's why the government and the unions have the same essential priority: prevent the convergence between the world of wage-workers and that of the young in education who are simply the future insecure workers.

That's why they did everything to prevent the meeting planned at the end of the Paris demonstration on 23 March from taking place, with the aid, among others, of provocateurs (breaking shop windows and attacking demonstrators), followed and helped by a few hundred manipulated misfits, as more and more numerous accounts testify. The decision, on the pretext of safety, to close the university sites went in the same direction of depriving the movement of places where to meet and organise.

Our priority is to counter this sabotage. We must speak out. We must create places to meet, discuss, reflect together, make decisions, everywhere where this is possible: at the end of and during demonstrations, on the campuses and in the schools, workplaces, places of public entertainment, etc., in particular at the end of the day so as to allow those who work to come.

Break down the separations. Create places where the strength of the generalised discontent can become an active power.

Capitalism is not a fatality due to some evil human nature. Capitalism is no more eternal than ancient slavery or feudalism. The inhuman laws that constitute it are from past times. It only survives by the force of state apparatuses and by our submission, sustained every day by the billions spent on daily ideological indoctrination.

Let us take advantage of these moments of struggle, when we assert ourselves, to recognize what is evident: another world is possible, if we want it. A world where humans are no longer forced to sell themselves to survive, where human relationships are not destroyed by money. A world based on abundance and on things being free. We know that the material means exist. We need to free ourselves from our own fear and from those who falsely call themselves our "representatives".

**Some Internationalists.**

March 26

<http://cercledeparis.free.fr/>

# The Banlieue Burns

If revolutionary theory is to be a force, not only to interpret the world, but also to change it, it must be more than a mantra to be repeated regardless of the specifics of the situation. It must be able to analyze and to interpret as a guide to future understanding. The civil disturbances which swept France in October and November of 2005 were not new occurrences. Similar 'negotiations by riot' have taken place in the U.K. and the U.S. in recent memory on a number of occasions. The task for revolutionaries is to seek to situate this uprising within such patterns and to reasonably anticipate how these actions affect working class politics. Regrettably, within sections of the revolutionary milieu, the old dogmas about the "need for a revolutionary party" surfaced without much analysis.

Such knee-jerk expressions do not advance the understanding of the period of history we live in. We believe that in the decadence of capitalism, the deepening of the real domination of capital, and the continued displacement of living labour from the productive process, such riots are not only likely, but inevitable. As Marxists, we seek to explain not only the cause of such upheavals, but also the nature of them, and to see how this revolt might be tied to a broader revolt against class society.

Some of the questions we need to ask are why these explosions happened, who were the rioters and were they a part of the working class, and lastly what is the significance of these actions? The answers sketched in this brief article, cannot be conclusive in these areas, but we can make some preliminary conclusions.

## What Happened?

For three weeks, France saw angry and often violent protest. Images of rioting youth, riot police, and burning cars filled the media images (often the same images as the newspapers sought to increase their circulation). Nevertheless, it was the most visibly impressive and widespread insurgency since the days of '68. On October 27, 2005, within hours of the deaths of two youth of North African origin, 23 police cars were aflame, and youth from the northern Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois were pelting police with bricks and stones.

It is hard to know what would have happened if on the day after the deaths, the right-wing Interior Minister Nicholas Sarkozy had not referred to the rioters and scum and denied the police were chasing the youth. After all, close to a hundred cars are burnt every night in France. However Sarkozy did make his infamous comments, and for 22 days, riots covered France: Besides the suburbs of Paris,

300 towns also saw riots; 10,000 cars were burned with a nationwide high of 1,480 on November 6-7; almost 3,000 people were detained for questioning (1,000 of them minors); 126 police and gendarmes were injured in the events. By November 17, the authorities announced a return to normal, although the state of emergency proclaimed on November 9 remained in effect until January 4.

Yet despite the violence, we should recall, that it was largely violence against *property*: Police, cars, bus stations, postal vans and dozens of public buildings were set on fire or attacked. In such situations, innocents inevitably are harmed: The two most publicized acts of violence being a 61 year-old man who died from a beating by a hooded youth in Saines, and a handicapped woman who suffered severe burns when she was unable to escape from a bus which had been set on fire. While there is no excuse for these actions, it should also be remembered that the state's score was two bodies.

## Who Were The Rioters?

Those involved in the riots were said to be young of various national origins and spread across France. As the riots spread, they became a focus for other grievances across France (they were even to inspire copycat actions in Belgium, Germany and several other European countries).

Clichy-sous-Bois is a banlieue (suburb) approximately 10 miles from the centre of Paris. Yet, while it is a suburb of Paris, Clichy-sur-Bois is clearly separate; the Paris Metro does not serve the town, and the nearest rail link is in neighbouring La Raincy, approximately 4 KM away. The town dates back to the middle ages, but it was not until the 1950s and 60s that urbanization began to take place with the creation of mass social housing projects, designed to provide decent housing for the waves of immigrants settling in France. While the planners' vision was of spacious housing away from the crowded inner city, the result has been something like the world grimly depicted in Mathieu Kassovitz's 1995 film *La Haine*. The population of this and similar communes suffer the daily challenges of unemployment, racism and boredom.

The population of these cities has been fed by large scale immigration, but this is not a new phenomena. In many cases, those involved in rioting were not immigrants, but the sons and daughters, as well as grandsons and granddaughters of immigrants; however, for many among the broader French population, they are still considered immigrants or North Africans, not yet fully French instead; they represent, the 'other,' the dark, the North African, the Muslim.





*Suburban bliss, near Paris*

In addition to the daily racism, employment within these towns is chronic. Official statistics place the unemployment rate as 1.5 times higher than Paris. And here too racism is a factor. According to a BBC report, unemployment for university graduates in France is around 5%; however, for graduates of North African origin, the figure is an astonishing 25.6%. The leftist organization SOS Racisme conducted a sting operation sending identical resumes with “European” and “North African” names and received many more responses for the former than the latter. The French state offers tax incentives for companies to locate within the suburbs, but this does not necessarily translate into jobs for the community. A “non-French” name or an address from the wrong neighbourhood is often enough for the application to be passed over in favour of a more respectable one. It was reported that at a community meeting in Aulnay-sous-Bois, few expressed sorrow at the burning of a Renault dealership, since it employed no local people and was seen as parasitic.

The youths who took part in the rioting were alienated, isolated and angry. But they saw results: The news media quoted one youth as stating, before the rioting, the police always referred to him by the informal “Tu”, but after they used the more respectful “Vous” form of address.

Because the riots were largely spontaneous and leaderless, many leftist commentators were dismissive of the events. While many organizations produced statements or allegedly distributed leaflets (to whom one wonders?), some seemed to feel that the apparent yet unspoken demand for inclusion into society meant that the riots were simply a way of blowing off steam, and that they posed nothing of significance. Does this mean that a strike which is controlled by the unions and which demands nothing more than better health benefits and wages means it poses nothing of significance? Its class basis is clear. Only armchair revolutionaries can expect to out of poverty and

racism textbook revolutionary struggle perfectly formed like Athena emerging from Zeus’ forehead.

### Was this a Working Class Uprising?

In *the Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote of capitalism creating its own gravediggers. In this, they meant that the very conditions of capitalism presupposed a class which having no other choice to survive, sold its labour power to the capitalist class. Yet, through the requirement in drawing workers together, a collective consciousness was created as men and women defined their common interests against those with different common interests. In turn, this consciousness led to the formation of trade unions, and mass working class political parties. The development of the Fordist system of production was accompanied by a mass industrial working class. However, with the collapse, the overcoming of Fordism and the dispersal of global production, sometime called globalization, capitalism has broken up those old patterns of working class solidarity. This pattern is nothing new, and has happened time and time again throughout capital’s rule. As new patterns of work emerge, new patterns of solidarity arise.

What is different in the latest evolution of capitalism is the development of joblessness on a mass scale (even though, the U.S. rust belts of the 1980s are a similar pattern). For the dwellers of the French suburbs, joblessness is not a temporarily displacement from work as during a downturn or a recession. These youth are not simply displaced from the world of work, they have never been a part of it. Most have had to be content to exist on the margins of employment. While they are the sons and daughters of some of the most exploited, least protected elements of French society, they are not at least in a technical sense a part of the world of work. Yet, the rioters are clearly a part of the working class by their status in society, having nothing to offer except for their labour power, even if there are no buyers.

But if no leaders stepped forward, there were plenty of youth willing to express their frustration with the French state, with the police, with the local businesses which would not hire them. Moreover, if actions speak louder than words, the voice of the rioters did present demands in their choice of targets. By primarily attacking symbols of the French state, the police, the fire fighters, the postal vans, the rioters also seemed to protest the harassment at the hands of the police, the changing welfare policies of the state and to demand not to be treated so badly. Yet, we must also be clear, that attacking other workers cannot be supported as a tactic of the class struggle. As collective action creates a collective consciousness and solidarity, it remains to be seen what effect the riots will have over this section of the working class and to class in general.

### What are the perspectives?

The events of October and November raise many questions for revolutionaries: Questions about new forms of struggle, about the recomposition of the working class, and how those excluded from traditional work forms fit into working class struggle.

Many leftist commentators issued leaflets supporting or defending the riots against the state repression, but simply noted that the rioters had little social power and ended with a call for the revolutionary party. A part of this analysis was the notion that the riots had no perspective and could only end in either bloody repression by the state or fizzling due to exhaustion. In the end, it seems to have been a combination. While the state presence might have capped some of the incidences, it is clear they were not in a position to extinguish them right away. While the state used the riots to increase law and order legislation and the police presence, it was also clear they were unable to contain the rioters until the riots burned themselves out.

In the short term, there will be commissions to discover how this could have happened, and what can be done to prevent it happening again. There will be calls by the right for more law and order and repression. The demands can take one of two forms. The demand is to protect French society and promote a secular “French” identity. Besides demonizing the “non-French” elements, such as the campaign against the headscarf (and thus strengthening the cultural nationalists), it also makes a cult of French democracy, and attempts to bind people to the democratic capitalist state. The approach of the left will be to argue that France needs to develop a more multi-cultural identity and will call for money to be spend on community centres, ping-pong tables and make-work jobs, as well as some mention of community control over policing and democratizing the state. .

Both solutions see the problem of the riots as being one of a national identity. Both tend to divide those who took to the streets away from class along racial lines. These ‘solutions’ will strengthen the hands of both the right who see these ‘immigrant’ communities as a threat to French

society, and the cultural nationalists within the immigrant communities, in this case the Islamists, who were largely impotent and struggled unsuccessfully to assert control during the uprising.

Of course, the heart of the problem is not mentioned, nor can it be. It is a class based problem. In previous issues of *Internationalist Perspective*, we have analyzed capitalist society as decadent, and in a phase called the real domination of capital. One consequence of this is that because of the needs of capitalist production, capital must continually expel living labour from the productive process, thus continually creating ticking time bombs like the French banlieue. But this is not simply a French problem, it is a global one. And unless the struggles of these sections of the working class can find ways to link their struggle with the broader working class milieu, there will be no end in sight.

**FISCHER**

February 28

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### Post Script

Less than three months after rioting and social unrest engulfed the French suburbs, the French ruling class is face to face with another huge social upheaval. If it is simplistic leftist logic to see the current struggles as a direct result of the events of last year, it is equally foolish to deny any connection between them. Famous graffiti from the days of May 1968 had it that the only reasonable demand was to demand the impossible. Social struggle and revolutionary actions are never reasonable... until they are. Then the impossible becomes the only reasonable course.

The introduction by the Villepin government of the CPE (‘First Hiring Contract’) was intended to make the conditions of employment of young workers more precarious in order to increase the rate of exploitation of French capital. Unfortunately for de Villepin, the plan has met with the opposition of hundreds of thousands who correctly see that their lives will be worse should the government succeed in its goals. The upheavals of last October and November have made this resistance easier.

Earlier we wrote, “And unless the struggles of these sections of the working class can find ways to link their struggle with the broader working class milieu, there will be no end in sight,” but it is clear from the current struggles that the reverse is equally true.

# ON THE NECESSITY AND POSSIBILITY OF REVOLUTION

*The following text is a response to FD's article in IP 43, "With the crisis of capitalism, what is the perspective for a new society?"*

The reference, in the title of FD's very thought-provoking text, to "the crisis" might lead one to expect an examination of "economic" phenomena, but the crisis here referenced is situated rather more on the level of alienation, of the increasingly de-humanizing nature of the specifically capitalist social form in its phase of historical decline; that is to say, of the increasing gap between species being (or, alternatively, what is required to fulfill the needs of humankind) and social being.

## Necessity Of Revolution

For me, the heart of the discussion in this text concerns the question of the *historical necessity* of the communist revolution in Marxist theory. The increasing decline of capitalism into technologically advanced barbarism threatens the entire human species, all other species, and indeed the entire biosphere of the earth. This contemporary reality establishes the *necessity* of anti-capitalist, which is to say, communist, revolution. "But", asks F., "are we talking about an ineluctable process?" That is, what *kind* of necessity are we talking about here? The question is really a philosophical one.

A number of *traditional* Marxists have claimed that the *necessity* of the communist revolution is of a sort which they call "historical necessity", and there are certainly remarks in various (mostly 'early') texts by Marx and Engels that lend support to such claims. Was this nothing more than the "Hegelian legacy", or was it rather also due in part to immaturity, of both the capitalist social reality, and the theoretical critique of that "political economy" Marx made his life's work? FD explicitly rejects this type of "historical necessity".

In fact, the "Hegelian legacy" is not the only factor leading various traditional Marxists to believe in the "historical necessity" of the communist revolution. A number of non-Hegelian Marxists have been led to believe that Marx's mature, "economistic", "objectivist" theoretical work (*Grundrisse*, *Capital*, etc.) forms a kind of "science" of society and history, a science which clearly establishes the inevitability of communism. This "scientistic" vision, in which Marxist dialectical materialism is a positive science complete with "laws" that govern all social activity, became dominant within the Second International, the Third International, and even the communist left, both its

Italian and German-Dutch varieties. As far as I know, it is still dominant in the Bordigist milieu and in some councilist tendencies, and not only there.

The vision here is that Marx established that capitalism is destined to decline and collapse, that the inextinguishable tendency to the historical decline of the rate of profit of capital will lead to increasing economic crises and social convulsions which will cause the capitalist class to increasingly attack the living conditions of the ever-growing numbers of the working class, which will result in increasing resistance and collective struggle by the workers, leading to a revolutionary situation. (For the Leninists, the class struggle's development gives rise to the Party's development, making the revolution possible; while for the anti-Leninists, there is no such role for any party, the revolution being seen as a spontaneous outgrowth of the class struggle.) A given revolutionary uprising may be unsuccessful, but if capitalism is not abolished, the necessity of revolution will remain (and intensify), further uprisings will inevitably come about, and, eventually, a successful revolution will result.

FD distinguishes two historical visions within the revolutionary movement. He calls one "evolutionist", the other "voluntarist". The former "... sees the emergence of a new society on the basis of the premises of capitalist society itself. Here, the question of consciousness is not even posed; a strict determinism reigns, reducing the movement to communism to a simple kind of productivism, and interpreting Marxist theory as an explanation of the ineluctable laws of motion of society. The other vision ... insists on the conscious activity of the proletariat as the key to change -- though different interpretations exist with respect to the level of consciousness required, the origins of that consciousness, and the way in which it is generated."

What FD terms the "evolutionist" vision is quite similar to what I above called a "scientistic" vision. It could also with reason be described as "objectivist", "determinist", and "reductionist". It would seem to be clear that we all want to reject this *traditional, orthodox* Marxist perspective. Does that mean that we all by default adhere to what FD calls the "voluntarist" vision? The problem is that there are many "voluntarist" visions. Anarchist voluntarism, which completely neglects the state of development of society's productive forces, believing that anti-capitalist revolution is possible at any time in history, gets lumped together with Leninism, as well as with whatever non-"evolutionist" vision we might want to defend today. This is not satisfactory, it seems to me.

The view that the "emergence of a new society [rests] on the basis of the premises of capitalist society itself" -- which FD attributes to the evolutionist vision -- is, I would argue, an essential thesis of Marxism, one that even "voluntarist" Marxists would defend. The development of capitalism prepares the way for communism, it makes the latter an historical possibility, by developing the productive forces to the point where it is possible to eradicate scarcity for the entire human species. This is a matter of the "objective" conditions of capitalist society. This thesis separates non-"evolutionist" Marxists from genuine voluntarists, both anarchists and utopians. Genuine voluntarists take into account only subjective conditions, consciousness -- and even then, typically, only partially -- while non-"evolutionist" Marxists take into account both the subjective and the objective conditions, both consciousness and "political economic" conditions. The problem, for developing a new Marxist vision adequate to the 21st century, is how to balance the subjective and the objective forces in a unified revolutionary theory.

Any coherent Marxist theory walks a fine line between determinism and 'indeterminism' (the antithesis of determinism). Marx theorized how social reality and social activity could be explained in terms of the development of human productive forces and the class relations and interests of the various members of the society. These factors, and the class struggles that ensue from them, are held to be the 'motor' of social change throughout the history of class society. As FD has it, they 'regulate' social activity; they are 'determinant'. This isn't determinism, but it's not that far from it either, at least as compared with the various religious or mystical 'indeterminist' visions. FD: "The fundamental, finally decisive, process [in the course that history takes] is the development of the material and social forces of production." But at the same time: "History is not left to chance, but it is also not regulated by a pre-determined and inflexible necessity."

While the "evolutionist" historical vision discussed earlier would defend the 'inflexible necessity' of the course of history, the "voluntarist" vision, as FD says, insists on the role of consciousness in the process. But consciousness by itself does not contradict determinism and socio-economic necessity. In fact, Marx explained how consciousness in class society was largely determined -- or at least regulated -- by material class interests and conditions. For the evolutionists, consciousness as such is a mere reflection of one's class interests and conditions, nothing more.

FD writes: "... Marx said, history follows a certain course, a general line of development, within which the consciousness and will of individuals has only played a modest role, at least until now." This is a very important point. Human consciousness and 'free will' (the will of individuals) develop, evolve through history. Their role in the historical process tends to grow over time. The progressive decline of the reign of natural necessity over human activity throughout the course of history is a

concomitant, the flip side, of this development of consciousness and free will, which includes also scientific and technical knowledge and their application.

But while the influence of natural necessity diminishes, the role of socio-economic necessity comes to assume a greater influence. This is especially so within the capitalist historical epoch. The domination of society by the law of value, which is really a law of social processes and relations, increases with the transition to the real domination of capital. The real domination of capital over society essentially comes to replace the previous domination by nature. Reification of capitalist social relations gradually takes hold over the consciousness of all classes and layers of society. Those social relations come to seem intransigent, even permanent, to all who find themselves subject to them.

To settle the question of the necessity of the communist revolution, then, it seems to me that the *kind* of necessity concerned is not historical, in either a teleological or a 'scientific' sense; rather, it is *practical*. Given humankind's material, practical needs, and given the reality of the threat posed by capitalism to those needs, the revolution is a necessity, period. It is a question of human (and biospheric) *survival*, which reality calls forth a tendency to a growing collective refusal to tolerate increasing, technologically advanced, barbarism and environmental degradation. This question of survival is of course analogous to the problem of survival humankind has previously faced. But in the past it was a question of survival in the face of natural disasters, dangers and threats. Now it is a question of survival in the face of the disasters, dangers and threats posed by an increasingly out of control, yet man-made and man-directed, socio-economic system. There is no *historical* necessity or teleological process involved in this vision, simply the practical, material needs of humankind.

## Possibility Of Revolution

It is the global proletariat's consciousness of these needs, and their collective will to pursue their fulfillment in the face of the increasingly barbaric reality of capitalist 'progress' which make the communist revolution possible. The collective will to pursue their common needs is something that is forged in open struggle, in resistance to the depredations of capital. For me, this collective *will* of the working class is inseparable from the class' consciousness; in fact, I consider it to be an essential aspect of that consciousness. It is a serious mistake, as far as I am concerned, to separate the collective 'consciousness' from the collective 'will' of the working class (as the Italian communist left traditionally has, for example). For consciousness, in this sense, would be reduced to mere awareness or contemplation, that is, to the bourgeois form of consciousness typical of the period of capitalist historic decline; a form thoroughly analyzed and critiqued by Georg Lukacs in his "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (found in his *History and*

*Class Consciousness*). For any adequate Marxist theory today, the class consciousness of the proletariat is essentially (but not only) *practical*: it is oriented to collective practice, to open struggle, towards the historical abolition of capital, and it largely arises directly out of the experience of collective struggle against the ruling capitalist class. Class consciousness, then, encompasses at least (i) a clear collective awareness of our common human needs and aspirations, (ii) a clear collective awareness of the socio-economic context in which the working class finds itself, and (iii) a collective will to pursue the satisfaction of these needs in the face of the endless obstacles that the process of capital, mired in permanent crisis, places in the way of such satisfaction.

Capital has its own needs, and among these is the need for (the members of) the working class to subsume their human needs to the needs of the perpetuation of the process of capital. Those human needs are (in large part) not met under capitalism, but capital requires that the subjects whose needs they are do not acquire an awareness that it is precisely the ongoing process of capital that prevents the fulfilling of those needs. That is why the ideological agents of capitalist rule go to such great lengths to divert, to distract, and to confuse the masses of the working class from achieving such an awareness. Information overload and ideological incoherence are the order of the day in the current conditions of communications technology advanced acceleration. In this confusing situation, in which whole economic sectors are displaced or arise in a relative blink of the eye, in which the contours of the classes are constantly shifting, in which the state is continuing to offload its role as provider of social security for all, in which the realm of fantasy and ‘virtuality’ is rapidly expanding and becoming increasingly ‘real’, it becomes increasingly difficult for the working class to find its way out of this swamp and to acquire a critical awareness that it is the process and relations of capital that stand in the way of the fulfilling of their needs.

It is not only the collective will to resist the demands of capital that is forged in open struggle. The other two elements of class consciousness referred to above – awareness of our common human needs, and awareness of our social context – are also largely forged in open struggle. When such struggle occurs, new truths are directly learned on a mass scale, truths about what workers (and others in their class) have in common, and truths about the nature of the capitalist social system they confront. (At the same time, once a certain level of awareness of the social context is achieved through struggle, further understanding can occur outside of struggle, but it is always in relation to coming struggles.) As long as the struggle continues to move forward, the more of these truths are learned, the more that class consciousness is advanced. And to the extent that the militants of the struggle are able to spread the truths they have uncovered to others in their class, the more they are able to push forward this development of class consciousness even further. This is one place where the

advancement of communications technology currently being developed by capital can be turned back against it by its ‘gravediggers’.

So the continued development of class consciousness would appear to rest on the working class’ willingness to engage in open struggle against the ruling capitalist class. We know that such struggle is inevitable as long as capital continues to develop, and especially as capital remains mired in a condition of permanent crisis. However, this struggle can remain limited to small numbers of workers at any given moment, or, involving larger numbers of workers, it can remain limited to the restricted forms and channels that the ruling class attempts to impose on it. As long as this situation holds, workers will remain defeated and demoralized, and the truths they learn in their struggles will remain limited, leading at best to the negative conclusion that these limited, defensive struggles “don’t pay”, that they are ineffective.

In such a situation, some parts of the class will, under the influence of one of the dominant ideologies, conclude that class struggle is invariably impotent. Only a minority are likely to conclude that the struggle must move to a higher level, to generalization to as much of the class as possible, and to open rejection of all legal and other restrictions in the way of such generalization. The larger part will likely remain doubtful and distrustful of struggle that goes further, struggle that involves more risk, more danger, that requires greater commitment. They will ask why they should trust other proletarians from other places aren’t familiar with as opposed to their own ruling class with whom they are very familiar and on whom they depend for their capitalist subsistence. Why should they abandon their existing condition for an unknown venture?

Marxism has, since its origin, always had to face these questions, questions which have led many serious militants to reject it. The response of Marxism has been to argue that history is essentially a matter of change, of social change, but also change of consciousness, change of attitudes and opinions. Men’s (humankind’s) circumstances change, whether as a result of the playing out of the trajectory of the mode of production they find themselves within, or as a result of certain ‘accidental’ or chance factors. These changes can have an enormous impact on their consciousness and attitudes, which in turn can lead them to act in ways previously unimaginable. It is Marxism’s comprehension of the trajectory of the capitalist mode of production in its epoch of historical decline that leads its defenders to the belief that the ever increasing misery, alienation and barbarism that capitalism is bound to inflict on humanity will bring about, at some point or another, such a massive change (or *alteration*, as Marx put it in *The German Ideology*) in the attitudes and consciousness of the working class that will tip the scales away from the fear of the unknown, fear of freedom, etc., and towards a practical determination to eliminate the social relations of capital, in favour of a free world human community.

It is one thing to be in active antagonism with the social relations constituting a mode of production and social system, and quite another thing to be practically orientated towards the creation of an entirely different social system (or whatever else one proposes replacing the old system with). The possibility of an entirely different social formation must be clearly envisaged before any significant part of the class will begin acting in a way which indicates that they have revolutionary intent, or that they form the beginnings of a *class-for-itself*. This is not to say that the detailed structure of such a social formation must be clearly envisaged; rather, it is simply the possibility that *some or other* clearly different social formation could replace capitalist society that needs to be believed. The concrete understanding that “another world is possible”, as long as it really is *another*, non-capitalist world, is important for the working class to come to in its collective consciousness. (See RV's text on 'the visibility of the revolutionary project' in *IP* 44.)

It will be, in fact, in the course of the working class'

struggles against capital and its ruling classes that the formation in their consciousness that *another world*, a post-capitalist social formation, is really (practically) possible, will come into being. That is because the possibility of transcending capitalism is to be found in the ways in which workers tend to relate to each other when they engage in common struggle against the demands of capital and its rulers. The solidarity, the fraternity, the equality, the community, the self-organization and class autonomy, these are all hallmarks of any post-capitalist society, and they are to be found, sometimes blooming, sometimes disappearing, in the course of various struggles of the working class in capitalist society today. As struggles develop and extend through the class, these relationships arise, and the further this develops, the clearer is the understanding forged by those involved that a post-capitalist society is really (practically) possible, and that it is their own conscious, collective activity that makes it possible.

E.R.

## LEFT TURN IN LATIN AMERICA

In sharp contrast to the 1990's, this first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a dramatic turn to the *left* throughout Latin-America; a turn brought about at the ballot box, within the framework of the very “democracy” that Washington worked so hard to establish on its Southern flank, and not from the springboard of guerrilla *foco* or *golpe d'estado*, as had been the case in the past.

2003 saw the election of the left-Peronist Néstor Kirchner as president of Argentina, followed in 2004 by the victory of Tabaré Vázquez Rosas, candidate of the leftist *Frente Amplio* in the Uruguayan presidential election. The past year has seen the consolidation of Hugo Chavez's “Bolivarian Revolution” in Venezuela, and the virtual certainty that he will win the next presidential election. Chavez's close ally, Evo Morales, standard-bearer of the MAS (Movement for Socialism), has won an overwhelming victory in the Bolivian presidential elections. Brazil, the dominant power in South America has a left government, led by Lula da Silva, and the expectation is that Lula and his Worker's Party will win re-election this year, while on the Pacific coast of South America, Chile, the site of a US orchestrated *golpe* three decades ago to overthrow a left government, has now elected another Socialist, Michelle Bachelet, to continue the tradition of center-left rule that has shaped the Chilean polity over the past two decades. As a result, three quarters of the population of South America now live under left governments. In the Caribbean, the victory of Rene Preval in Haiti's presidential election is another victory for the left, while in Nicaragua it seems possible that the Sandinista leader, Daniel Ortega, will win this year's

presidential election. Finally, Mexico's presidential election this year may well see a victory of the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution), under the leadership of Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador.

In the wake of this left turn in Latin America, there are four questions that Marxist revolutionaries need to confront. First, what impact will the coming of the left to power have on the working class and on the mass of the population in a region where living standards have sharply declined over the past several decades? Second, do left governments represent a rejection of the neo-liberalism that the American hegemon has sought to impose on Latin America, over the past two decades, a repudiation of globalization? Third, do left governments represent a threat to the domination of the United States over the Western hemisphere, a danger to American imperialism? Fourth, do left governments, however “radical,” pose a challenge to capitalism, and its rule; a challenge to the mode of production based on the operation of the law of value, and its growing barbarism; in short, is this left turn in any way, shape or form anti-capitalist?

The decade of the 1990's in Latin America saw the widespread acceptance by its ruling classes and elites of what has come to be known as the “Washington Consensus,” enshrined in the de-nationalization of key sectors of the economy previously state owned, and the sale of the leading enterprises in raw materials, public utilities, banking, insurance, and the media, to multinational firms, most often North American, the opening up of markets, hitherto “protected,” to foreign

commodities and capital, the imposition of draconian fiscal and monetary policies, linked to IMF *diktat*, and of WTO style “free trade” policies. The failure of decades of protectionism, economic nationalism, populist dictatorships of the left and right, to raise living standards or to reduce poverty, led to the election of center-right governments in much of Latin America. A decade later, the failure of the “Washington Consensus” to raise the standard of living or to reduce the numbers of people who live in abject poverty, led to mass movements, strikes, and social struggles directed at the depredations of globalization, and the center-right governments that promoted it. Into the void created by the collapse of the “Washington Consensus” and the regimes that supported it, stepped a series of left politicians, untainted by any connection to the discredited policies, who promised social justice, equality, and policies to raise the standard of living of the working class and the poor. The law of value, however, is implacable. And Latin America’s left governments cannot challenge the basic rules and norms of capitalist globalization, leaving them with little room to maneuver between the constraints of value production and the need to prevent a social explosion. In opposition, the left could promise to challenge the Yankee hegemon and the IMF; in power, and lacking the economic and fiscal resources to back up its incendiary rhetoric, what remains is recourse to theatre. Thus Evo Morales will, indeed, make good on his promise to end the Yankee imposed war on coca growers: “Causachun coca!” he dramatically shouted, Quechua for long live coca, thereby striking two chords that resonate with the Bolivian masses -- the use of the indigenous language and the in your face rhetoric to the Yankees. Uruguay’s new president, Rosas chose his inauguration day to re-establish diplomatic relations with Cuba. Argentina’s president Kirchner suspended the laws granting immunity to former military leaders for crimes committed under the dictatorship, and declared the country debt-free after it paid-off its IMF loans. There is nothing in any of that to rouse real concern in Washington – save for the feeling that it may not be too long before the Latin American working class comes to realize that chewing coca leaves is only a palliative for hunger. Indeed, only Venezuela, and that because oil prices are now at record highs, has the economic wherewithal to fund programs for the poor – and that is dependent on the health of the global capitalist economy. However, Hugo Chavez is spending the bulk of his profits elsewhere: a lavish and rapidly growing military budget, the formation of para-state agencies to spread his Bolivarian ideology, and the use of the country’s oil and gas revenues to prop up friendly regimes that share his vision. Meanwhile, the grinding poverty in which most Venezuelans live has not been alleviated, and any fall in oil prices will only exacerbate the effects of Chavez’s option for guns not butter.



*In this leftist cartoon, Latin America’s left turn hits uncle Sam where it hurts. Reality is different.*

“Neo-liberalism” in Latin America today does not mean what it meant in the 1980’s and ‘90s, when it was closely linked to the specific economic policies imposed on Chile, after the overthrow of Allende, by the Friedmanite “Chicago boys,” when its hallmark was the privatization of virtually all state owned industries, and draconian fiscal and monetary policies, necessary to initially promote American investment. What is essential for the American hegemon in Latin America today is fiscal “responsibility” on the part of the state, the standards of which are set by the IMF, and a basic commitment to free markets for capital and commodities. So long as the parameters of a quarter of a century of *globalization* are respected; so long as there is no return to the policies of import substitution, protectionism, nationalization, and obstacles to foreign investment, which characterized the left (and populist right) in Latin America, from the end of World War II through the 1970’s, left governments present neither a threat nor even a major inconvenience for the American hegemon. So, both “economic discipline” and a respect for free markets have characterized Chile’s center-left governments over the past two decades, with little or no change when the president was a Socialist – policies to which Michelle Bachelet is firmly committed. In Brazil, Lula has pursued economic policies in line with the protocols set down by the IMF, and his re-election will not cause a ripple in Washington. And to judge by his behavior as mayor of Mexico City, where the need to placate Washington was far less than it would be as president of Mexico, Lopez Obrador, and his PRD are unlikely to rouse the ire of either Washington or Wall Street: his most notable achievements as mayor included a determined policy to combat inflation, government support for private sector investment in housing, the forcible removal of squatters from undeveloped land, and the appointment of the ex-mayor of New York, and Republican presidential hopeful, Rudy Giuliani, as a consultant to craft a zero tolerance policy towards crime and corruption.

While Evo Morales, the new president of Bolivia rhetorically presents himself, and his MAS, as

Washington's worst nightmare, leading the neo-Stalinists of the *Monthly Review* to celebrate his victory as "a world historical event of the first order,"<sup>1</sup> the new president, as an effective condition for his taking office, first had to make his peace with the Santa Cruz *oligarchia*, the business interests who continue to dominate Bolivia's richest region. The *cruceño's* control over the country's vast oil and gas reserves, located in Bolivia's Eastern province, made their acceptance of Morales, and a virtual veto over his economic policies, a condition for the peaceful transfer of power. While the MAS's control of the largely indigenous population of the *Altiplano* made it indispensable if Bolivia was to have any kind of "social peace," a lesson that the past decade has driven home to both the local elites and to Washington, the *cruceños* threat to secede, and their control over the actual oil and gas reserves, has compelled the MAS to accept certain "rules of the game;" and the need for the profitable exploitation of the country's natural resources rules out a real challenge to the bases of globalization that is for now the norm of capitalism. In Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega's campaign rhetoric has taken a sharp left turn, as he seeks to become the next president, in contrast to his run in 2001, when he presented himself as pro-capitalist. Ortega now *sounds* like Morales, or Hugo Chavez, and Washington reacts to him in the same way. However, it is unlikely that even in the event of a Sandinista victory at the polls, there will be a real challenge to the bases of globalization and the policies of fiscal discipline that are linked to it. Moreover, Ortega has a challenger for the presidency who also claims the mantle of Sandino: Herty Lewites, the Sandinista mayor of Managua, recently expelled from the Sandinista party (because of his challenge to the authority of Daniel Ortega), who is the candidate of the Sandinista "business bloc," and who has openly championed good relations with the US: "We need one another," which masterfully sums up the actual position of the left in Latin America. Finally, there is Hugo Chavez, the latest incarnation of Latin American *caudillismo*, friend and ally of Fidel, and *lider* of the Bolivarian Revolution. However, beyond the rhetoric, socialist and anti-Yankee, Chavez insists that his model is one of "market socialism" (sic!), and his championship of the South American free trade zone (Mercosur), of which Venezuela is now a member,<sup>2</sup> and the formation of a consortium of state-owned oil companies, Petrosur, constitutes an implicit acceptance of some of the core elements of capitalist globalization, albeit with an anti-Yankee cover. Moreover, despite repeated claims that he will demand payment for Venezuela's oil in a currency other than the dollar, Chavez has made no move to

actually challenge that currency's supremacy in the oil market, one of the single most important bases of US global hegemony. In short, from the moderate left to the purportedly reddest "red," the left turn in Latin America does not seem to presage even a challenge to the economic hegemony of American capital.

What about a purported challenge of left governments to the military and political aims of American imperialism? While it is virtually impossible to separate the economic bases of US hegemony in Latin America from the overall strategic aims of American imperialism, even if one could, here too the "threat" to Washington from the left in Latin America is more rhetorical than substantive, aimed more at the control of the Latin American masses than at mounting any real challenge to the US's global rule. In discussing this particular issue, it is important to be clear about one point: opposition to American imperialism and its strategic aims, even when it is substantive and not primarily rhetorical, is not tantamount to opposition to capitalism. Were that not the case, revolutionaries should have supported Hitler and Stalin, who indeed, were serious in their opposition to American global domination. Clearly, one cannot mistake *inter-imperialist* conflict for anti-capitalist revolution. Yet, it seems clear that the left turn in Latin America is not the harbinger of a budding inter-imperialist conflict, an indication of a challenge to American domination of the capitalist world order. It is not that there are not those on the left (and the right) in Latin America who dream of mounting such a challenge, or that were such a challenge possible, as a result of US weakness, that a large part of the left would not seek to take advantage of it, and further it. At such a juncture, the rhetoric of the Chavez's, Morales', Ortega's, and even Lula's might well be transformed into real anti-American economic and foreign policy initiatives. But, we are not at that point yet, and, under present conditions, that kind of policy shift – which has *nothing* anti-capitalist or revolutionary about it – is not on the agenda of the left in power. Despite the search by left governments in Latin America, for example Lula's Brazil, for markets in Asia for its growing agricultural exports (Brazilian agribusiness is now the world's number one producer of soy beans, and desperately seeks new export markets), and sources of investment capital; despite the hoopla of Chinese president Hu's Latin American trip, rich in promises of Chinese investment and trade, there is a paucity of both. The US remains Latin America's biggest trading partner, and by far its largest source of investment capital. And the current left turn in Latin America does not mark the beginning of a challenge to the role of the US as the arbiter of capitalist order. Indeed, in Latin America especially, the extremely rapid growth of evangelical Protestantism, under the impetus of American missionaries, constitutes an additional, and little noticed, buttress to US cultural hegemony, the significant political implications of which are only beginning to become apparent.

Does the left turn about which we speak, then, represent any kind of threat to *capitalist* order in Latin America? And, if not, then what role does the left in power play in

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Review*, Vol. 57, No. 9, February 2006. An event comparable perhaps to Stalin's proclamation of "Socialism in one Country," or Mao's "Great Leap Forward," or his "cultural revolution," previously celebrated in numerous articles in that same publication.

<sup>2</sup> Mercosur is a free trade zone originally set up in 1986, between Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, with Bolivia and Chile as associate members.



that region of the world? Anti-capitalism is too often simply equated with opposition to American imperialism, with nationalism (e.g. Bolivarianism), or with a rejection of “free markets,” and a policy of economic autarky. Or, anti-capitalism is equated with a radical change in the mode of *distribution* of the wealth of society. At a time when such a variety of political projects claim to be anti-capitalist, everything but the abolition of the mode of *production* based on the operation of the law of value, and of wage labor as a commodity, which is the actual source of the barbarism through which humankind now lives, it is important to distinguish between changes – even radical changes<sup>3</sup> – in the structure of capitalism, and its revolutionary overthrow.

As a mode of production, capitalism has undergone, and doubtless will continue to undergo until its possible revolutionary overthrow, a series of mutations or transformations, aimed at consolidating its basic structures in the face of the contradictions with which it is rent. Among them are the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital, the growing intervention of the capitalist *state* in the operation of the law of value – this latter being in no way contradicted by the forms of neo-liberalism – as well as the transformation of a Fordist mode of production based on the assembly line into a mode of production based on a collective laborer, both manual and intellectual, and the formation of a single global market under the hegemony of the dominant capitalist power, in this instance the US. Those basic structures of capitalism, which persist through all the possible transformations internal to the operation of the law of value, are the exploitation of, and extraction of surplus-value from, a class of wage-workers, the *fetishistic* economic “laws” behind which stand this exploitation of the many by the few (the basic class structure of capitalism, of which *individual* private property is only one possible form), the imperative to the *accumulation of capital* (“private” or state), and the growing disjunction between *value* and *wealth* (exchange-value and use-value), a contradiction that no form of capitalism can escape. Nothing proposed by the left in Latin America (or anywhere else in the world) threatens those structures, not even the projects that Hugo Chavez still hesitates to reveal to the technocrats and bureaucrats who steer the ship of his Bolivarian Revolution. Everything proposed by the left aims at *perpetuating* those core structures of capitalism, while tinkering only with their forms.

What then does the left in power mean? It means that capitalism may be able to maintain its *control* over the working class and the mass of the population, even as the contradictions of capitalism rise to the surface and intensify to the breaking point. Here too *chavismo* is a case in point. Mass mobilizations against the Yankee devil,

<sup>3</sup> Moreover, even such radical changes in the structure of capitalism constitute not the first steps in a process leading to socialism, but rather the steps necessary to a re-consolidation, to a strengthening, of capitalism, and its class rule.

calls to emulate Simón Bolívar, slaveholder and leader of the *bourgeois* revolution in South America, who dreamed of a Latin empire, neighborhood committees to ferret out opponents of the regime (shades of Mao’s “cultural revolution”), and a vast program, *Vuelta al campo* (Return to the countryside) to send the poor and unemployed, whose ranks continue to swell, to work the land, which the left sees as a vast welfare and public works program, but whose other side is the gruesome face of forced labor: two sides of the same capitalist coin in this epoch. That is the real thrust of the left turn in Latin America. Against it are the stirrings of working class struggle and resistance, often *against* left governments, in countries like Argentina, for example. But that is a story of class struggle, very different from the left turn in Latin America whose broad outlines we have here sought to describe.

March 2006

MAC INTOSH

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## New Technologies and Communism

### CONTINUES FROM PAGE 22

in advance. It is a “humanist” vision of communism, as the finally, possible, realization of man.

There is something “new” in the new technologies, but there is also a continuity in the way in which technology masters man. Certain philosophers (Heidegger, for example) have grasped this, and constitute a reference point for those who think about the questions raised by technology: “The thought that counts calculates. It submits to calculation ever-new possibilities, ever richer in perspectives and at the same time more economical. The thought that calculates gives us no respite, propelling us from one task to another. The thought that calculates never stops, never withdraws into itself. It is not a meditative thought, a thought in search of meaning.” Or: “The organizations, the apparatuses, and machines, of the technical world have become indispensable – though greater for some, less for others. It would be mad to launch a frontal assault on the technical world, proof that one wanted to condemn that world as the work of the devil.

We depend on the objects with which technology provides us, and which we endlessly perfect. However, our attachment to technical things is now so great that we are, unbeknownst to ourselves, their slaves. But we can be otherwise.” You can take it from here.

But we revolutionaries are the only ones to have forged a link between the new technologies, “valueless” production, the growth of immaterial labor, the perspective of communism, and a critical look at the relation between technology and humankind. If we do not develop this critique, no one will do it in our place.

AN O’NYMOUS

# RETURN TO THE DEBATE ON SPECIES BEING

Number 43 of *Internationalist Perspective* launched debate about species being. This discussion seems fundamental to us because, beyond this concept of species being, what is at stake is what impels the proletariat to revolt against its very conditions of existence. In other words, how can we understand that, from the state of alienation in which the capitalist mode of production plunges our class, a political consciousness could emerge, allowing it to overthrow the established order and to create a society on completely new bases? In his commentary on volume II of *Capital*, Maximilian Rubel writes: "The point [made by Marx, concerning the smashing of capitalism] is clear: capitalism can and must destroy itself as a result of its own 'material' law. With respect to the law of creative revolution, it is not inscribed in the material conditions, but in revolutionary man."<sup>1</sup> Who is this "revolutionary man," how does he emerge, how does he constitute himself? In short, if the evolution of capitalism impels it to an exacerbation of its internal contradictions, does that mean that the perspective of its own destruction necessarily engenders the creation of a communist society? For some revolutionaries, the schema is quite simple: the worsening of material conditions engenders an absolute pauperization, with that pauperization, in its turn, impelling the proletariat – the revolutionary class – to create a new society. However, that schema raises many questions today. Are we necessarily going towards an absolute pauperization and is that the condition for the passage to communism? Pauperization, absolute or relative, can lead to a quest for individual solutions, to a heightening of competition *between* workers, and not necessarily to the search for collective solutions based on a vision of other social relations between men. Pauperization can lead to despair, and not lead to a flourishing of the creative, emancipatory, capabilities of the proletariat. This is not the time for unfounded claims, for unshakeable certainties, but rather a time to reopen the question of consciousness and communist revolution through a deepening of our understanding of the conditions for their emergence. The debate about the concept of *species being*, far from being a philosophical or ideological debate, is integral to the above tasks.

Critiques were formulated in connection with this concept of "species being".<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this text will be an attempt to continue this debate. In particular, I want to reconsider

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<sup>1</sup> *Le Capital – livre II Economie – notes et variants principes d'une critique* -- M. Rubel, Ed. La Pléiade, p. 1652.

<sup>2</sup> See the responses of Sander and Mac Intosh to my article on species being in IP # 43.

two points: What we mean by "species being" and how it is connected to a historical perspective; and the process of de-alienation.

## Species being and its historical expression

A first point concerns the term, species being, itself. I am not particularly attached to the words, themselves. They are those used by Marx in the Manuscripts of 1844. On the other hand, that which I defend is the existence of a "human nature", a "human essence", the "humanity" of Man, i.e., elements that make it possible to characterize and to differentiate mankind from other living species. Man is not only the strict result of a biological determination, of his adaptation to his material environment. He is also a being made of drives and needs which will find their expression and their realization (or their inhibition) in the historical-social context in which man, as social being, interacts with his environment, and submits to and transforms them. To speak of a "human nature, essence, or species being..." only makes sense if one examines how the humanity of man finds its concrete expression. In this sense, there is no separation between species being and social being, but rather a conflict between them, a contradiction which will be able to find its resolution only in the practices of a society with fundamentally different material and social bases than those in which we now live, with its scarcity and exploitation of man by man.

Thus, Sander, in his response in IP # 43, seems to accept the existence of a "species being," but one has to ask what exact content he gives to this concept. It seems to me that he mixes different biological elements - particularly genetic - and social practice. By doing that, it seems to me that he places himself halfway between my own framework and that, developed by Mac Intosh (also in IP # 43), that there is only social being. I could summarize Sander's position by quoting him: "Capitalism changed our species being, not through ideological influence but by creating new social practices, which create a new understanding by men of the world. So species being is very different today from what it was under "primitive communism" yet it is still the same, in the same way as a man is different from the child he was, yet still the same person". This vision does not seem to me to position itself clearly in relation to the question: does a "human essence" exist, "human characteristics" which cross epochs and societies and thus, can one accept a concept which would be, for Mac Intosh, a-historical? For me, species being corresponds to certain fundamental needs that exist in

human nature. Man seeks to realize them, to concretize them, but he can do so only in human society, i.e., in his activity of perpetual interaction with the world and with other men. That is why the form of realization follows the actual development of economic, cultural, social, and historical forms imposed by the context in which that realization seeks to express itself. There is, therefore, no transformation of species being but rather of the social form in which species being expresses itself. Thus, I agree with Sander when he says that the choices of the working class are not predetermined and that it can have a say in shaping these choices. When he raises this question to understand "why men have made such horrible and suicidal choices during history," I think that he raises a fundamental question, to which there is a twofold response. It is clear, that to speak of the human essence does not mean that there is a kind of human nature cleansed of all violence, an angelic human nature, without conflict, an idealized human nature. Among the features of human nature, there is aggression, competition, even hatred. But the precise form under which those features express themselves depends, in large part, on the determinant social context in which these features are actualized. It is what psychoanalysts mean when they distinguish between drives and the outlet of drives. For example, for Freud, it is culture that civilizes man. In other words, it is the existence of an organized human society that compels its members to inhibit, sublimate, or give a socially acceptable expression to their needs and drives; which permits them to pass from the simple act of discharge of a tension to a thought process. This line of thought can also be linked to other discussions: in a capitalist society dominated by the necessity for massive devalorization, that is, destruction, it is no surprise that social relations are characterized by a growing violence and that the act supersedes thinking and symbolization.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in the very development of his activity, man creates social relations to which he has given no thought. His activity has an impact on his environment, and that environment compels him to adapt to it, to develop practices of adjustment and defence that can go against his own long-term interests. Here is the indissoluble link between need, realization of that need in a social form, and a determinant historical context.

This leads me to take up what seems to me to be a contradiction in Mac Intosh's text. This text rejects the existence of a human nature: "Human being, in the form of species being, once it emerges, becomes *fixed* and *a-historical*. For me, such a vision constitutes a formidable obstacle to the historicity of human being and social relations that I believe is constitutive of Marxism as a theory " (p. 7). However, in the preceding paragraph, Mac Intosh says to us: "As biological creatures there are elements that are neither social nor cultural, certain innate needs and drives, but in that regard I am a minimalist, and, more to the point, even with respect to these needs and

drives, the *forms* they take are not biologically given but socially and culturally shaped, and historically variable" (p. 7). These citations allow us to suppose that Mac Intosh certainly acknowledges the presence of a "human nature" in the form of drives and innate needs. He then makes the distinction between these elements and the form in which they will find expression. I can only agree with this view of things: that's precisely the reason that there is for me no separation between species being and social being. The human being is a social being. He does not exist in abstract form, but entirely in the social, historical and cultural forms in which he deploys his human activity. By contrast, where Mac Intosh seems to attach needs and drives to only the biological sphere, I enlarge the sphere of needs and drives: the need for love, recognition, bonding, belonging, creativity, knowledge, all characterize what, from the point of view of his psychology, his reflection and his consciousness of himself and the ambient world, makes man above all a social being endowed with a subjectivity which can lead him to modify his behaviour, sometimes in opposition even to his own biological survival. Mac Intosh will then come back to a concept of "human nature" while reaffirming that it must be understood in a historical, and not a-historical sense. I would like to know Mac Intosh's view on this matter and how he would articulate a general concept (one which could then also be described as a-historical) and a vision of the movement of historical transformation. Are we as far apart as Mac Intosh makes it seem, or is it more a question of distancing himself from a term – species being -- too tainted by the debate between Hegelians and non-Hegelians?

Another question concerns the word "a-historical." To speak of history implies that one refers to a particular context, a context that is itself transformed through the interactions between natural events and human intervention. It's a matter, therefore, of a movement of transformation and interaction. But does movement exclude a synchronization of certain elements that are both constant in their bases and yet evolving? In other words, in speaking of a human essence, in what way is it "a-historical" if one believes that the very basis of the human nature of man is to seek a concrete realization, and, therefore, that it is – as a function of the historical, the socio-economic, and the geographical, context --always in the process of transformation? Does the recognition of the human essence of man entail, as Mac Intosh claims, "a *teleological* vision of history, in which the end or goal is fixed at the outset and, in which history becomes a narrative of a loss of the paradise of primitive communism ...and the regaining of this paradise through the communist revolution" (p. 8)? Once again, such a criticism relates to the separation between species being and social being whereas, for me, one cannot exist without the other. Man is unceasingly in search of the materialization, the actualization, of his species being, of the translation of his human needs in his link with his environment. It is what makes history a moving process, a movement impelled partly by the reciprocal interaction between man and his social context, in the perpetual search for the realization of

<sup>3</sup> See FD, "With the Crisis of Capitalism, What is the Perspective for a New Society," IP # 43.

his humanity. In that, to return "to man as he was before" would not make any sense: before what? Man cannot live outside of time: temporality is a fundamental given of his human essence; in fact, time anchors him to his origins, in a genealogy, in his own biological evolution. The idea of a return to a lost paradise would imply that there would have already been a paradise, it confuses primitive communism and communist society and it maintains that man can remove himself from time, and satisfy his needs in an abstract context, which is a negation of the human essence of man. Jacques Camatte in *Bordiga et la passion du communisme* arrives at precisely that point: "the metamorphosis that modern man, the wage-working proletarian, undergoes in an economy based on private property is a departure from the human essence, to which members of primitive society were closer. Alienated by the commodities for which he sells himself, his time and his labor-power; the proletarian alienates himself from "man." He is simply a commodity, a physical object without life (...) To re-cover himself, to go from being a non-man, to a man, the alienated worker will not go back to the person, to the individual, he was *before*, closing a useless and stupid cycle which would have no other perspective than a second and eternal sale of himself as a slave, but will reconquer, with his class and for all of society and mankind, the quality of man not as a singular individual, but as part of the new humanity of communism."<sup>4</sup> I can only agree with Mac Intosh when he calls for the redefinition of the concepts of alienation and human nature that "must be defined so that they are *prospective* and not *retrospective*." (p. 8) That is precisely the position that I am defending: species being is a being-in-becoming, and what impels the alienated proletariat towards a break with the old social relations, and the creation of a new society, is the quest for the satisfaction of human needs, of its human nature.

In that, I want to dissociate myself from the more pronounced "biological" definition that Sander seems to bring to species being. He seems to attach much of our human tendencies to the genetic roots of mankind and I certainly do not follow him on this path. Thus, when he takes the example of jealousy or suicide, since these phenomena traverse historical and cultural periods, it is because they are a part of our genetic heritage, of our biological patrimony. Freud defines the "drive" by saying that it is a concept that is at the intersection of the somatic and the psychic. And this seems fundamental to me in understanding how, man (but not man alone), has intrinsic, objective and subjective, elements, biological and emotional. If we take the example of jealousy, we can say that it is the crossroads of two fundamental needs: the need for reproduction and self-preservation - fundamental biological needs - and the need for love, bonding - psychic needs, just as fundamental. Sander gives too much importance, in my opinion, to the genetic aspect, thus reducing the definition of species being to only the biological needs of the species. What then to make of other

elements like "collective consciousness" or other subjective elements? Do they form part of species being? There again, as MacIntosh says, we all have to redefine the content that we bring to concepts.

## The process of de-alienation

This is, of course, the fundamental question, the one at the origin of this debate on species being! How can the collective worker, alienated in an increasingly profound way by the modes of subjectification imposed by the real domination of the capitalistic mode of production, become conscious of his alienation and develop a political consciousness enabling him to extricate himself from this alienation and to envision completely new human relations?

For Mac Intosh, this development of consciousness arises from a contradiction internal to capitalism, between the subjectification produced by the dominant system and the space of freedom and autonomy imposed by the use of continuously developing technologies. Of course, capitalism contains a fundamental contradiction: that of the necessity for the existence of a working class and that of the necessity, for the very survival of the collective worker, to deny themselves as a class-for-capital, to destroy the global capitalist social relation, to destroy the relations of domination, of exploitation, imposed by the ruling class and governed by the law of value and private property. From this fundamental contradiction, a series of others result and we see the tendencies and counter-tendencies which develop within capitalism.

Nevertheless, two questions arise here: what "autonomy", what "freedom"? Does Mac Intosh tell us when the practices entailed by these two terms can be exercised within the capitalist framework? Within the internal contradictions of the capitalistic mode of production, what is the engine that propels the collective worker to consider his situation as unacceptable to the point of letting go of all the illusions that he still has? The vision of the ICC provided a simple answer to this question: the economic crisis plunged the exploited into a situation of precariousness and of absolute pauperization such that they were constrained, to ensure their own survival, to destroy the chains which bound them. If we take into account the objective factors in the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, we also need to dissociate ourselves from a deterministic vision binding the development of a political consciousness to economic contingencies alone, as Mac Intosh correctly points out. He then points to factors endogenous, and not exogenous, to the worker: the experience of freedom and autonomy that would bring about an awareness of the capitalist shackles. In a certain sense, this vision is linked to the debate about "new technologies" in IP # 44: do we regard science and technology as separable from the operation of the law of the value and/or do we see certain types of behaviour as counter-tendencies within capitalism that could provoke actions which would be able to challenge the sacrosanct law of the value? Does Mac Intosh think

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Camatte, *Bordiga et la passion du communisme*, Ed. Spartacus, pp. 175-176.

that the freedom and autonomy necessary to the use of capitalist technology constitutes an experience of "freedom of being" and a "real autonomy," there where the penetration of the law of the value in all the domains of our activity, including our conception of the world and of ourselves, has invaded the whole of life? More generally, this brings us back to the question of the emergence of a new society: does it find the beginning of its expression within capitalism's contradictions or does it require a profound break with all the ways of thinking, all the modes of activity, produced under the yoke of capitalism?

For my part, it is the second vision that I defend! It is evident that the process of the development of consciousness, at the outset, is born of the multiple experiences of the class: the pressure of the economic crisis; distress vis-a-vis the omnipresent destructiveness of capitalism; the absence of any perspective; the development of forms of work which would allow us to foresee other ways of doing it. But, the question, for me remains: why, at a particular moment, does one want to live otherwise; what is it that can propel the collective worker, not to want to kill the competitor for his job, but to call the very system into question? What leads an individual to say that the point that has been reached is now unacceptable? Certainly not objective criteria! Moreover, it is only in the break with the established order, and not within the framework of it, that the workers can have the experience of freedom and autonomy, and this break occurs in the movement of open opposition to the ruling class: the class struggle.

To conclude...

This debate raises fundamental questions in relation to the emergence of the political consciousness of the proletariat. For me, it is about a complex process that utilizes both objective elements (the lived experience of capitalist contradictions, exclusion, exploitation, the pressure of the crisis...) and subjective ones. Nevertheless, the conception of human needs, in the species sense of the term, in the sense of the human essence, remains a fundamental concept that explains why alienated individuals seek to de-alienate themselves. As pointed out by Bordiga, capitalism made of man a non-human individual, in a situation of alienation from himself and his human nature. Man has always sought to give a social form to his basic needs. That is the engine that can push him to seek an adequate social form for the expression, and the realization, of his needs in a society with fundamentally different human relations than those in which he is alienated. When we say that it is in living his inhumanity that man seeks to again find himself, one can only turn to the concept of a human essence.

**ROSE**

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*Reply # 1 :*

## A conflict within

Rose thinks my concept of human nature is based too much on biology. Yet my text was meant in part as an argument against biological determinism. I concluded that our biological heritage gives us impulses and desires that are far too contradictory for any predictions on the future of mankind to be based upon. Nor do they give us a sufficient explanation of our past. I was led into this by Rose's own emphasis on an invariant concept of species being. The only thing which is recognizably invariant is our biological base, which hasn't undergone any major changes for at least a 100 000 years. Or at least, that's what's assumed. What is invariant besides that, I'm not sure. What about collective consciousness, Rose says. I agree, that is an essential part of human nature, but is it invariant? Is human collective consciousness not a product of human history and therefore, by definition evolving? At the latest conference of IP, a comrade, in defence of an historically invariant concept of species being, pointed to the fact that a play by Sophocles, written thousands of years ago, can still move us to tears today, or that we can still admire the cave paintings of pre-historic men. We must indeed recognize the flowering of human potential in societies much older than ours. That this potential, in different societies, in part develops the same things, is not surprising and indeed shows a strong communality between us and humans from earlier times. But whether it means that our species being is unchanging is another matter. Still, it's a good thing to point out. It shows that our history is not a linear process, it goes through peaks and valleys, losses and gains. In that sense, the metaphor I used to make my point in my earlier article --that we have the same species being as the earliest humans and yet are different, as an adult is different from the child he once was and yet the same-- is somewhat lacking, in that it applies the natural, predictable course of a human's life to the unpredictable course of humanity. Still, the metaphor captures something that is real. We are the same and yet different, and through all the gains and losses, there is a growing up, an expansion of human consciousness and its potential.

It seems to me that "human essence" is inherently unstable. If we want to establish how it differs from the species being of other mammals, it is not to our social nature we should point, or our need for affection, our capacity to care for others, sometimes at the risk of our individual survival ... we share those traits with other species. Just this week there was a report on the remarkable talent for cooperation of chimpanzees. What is unique about humans is constant change. What characterizes our species being is that it is always in a state of becoming. Some may call it our curse, but we can't live in the moment. In any "now," there's past and future. Other species can only change by adapting to the changing

natural environment, mainly through the biological mechanism of natural selection (though some other species do also evolve culturally somewhat). But we adapt our natural and social environment to us and change ourselves in the process. That's why I titled my earlier contribution to this debate "Human nature: a work in progress". That progress is now blocked by capitalism, so the conflict of our times is not just one between productive forces and relations of production, but also between capitalism as a man-made environment, propelled by an inner dynamic to autonomize itself from human needs, and our human nature whose essential feature – becoming -- now requires the destruction of this obsolete social construction.

While in my replies I emphasize the unstable essence of species being, Rose, in her texts, emphasizes the stable essence, the bond we share with humans from other eras and other areas and even other classes. I agree that this is as real as our bond with our earlier and future selves. Are we then talking about two sides of the same coin? Maybe, but then we must recognize that the coin has two sides. Rose doesn't do that in my opinion.

There's a lot we agree upon. I agree with her position that the development of revolutionary consciousness cannot solely be explained by economic crisis and the misery it brings. This misery impedes the satisfaction of the primary needs for food, shelter and security for ever more people and thus explains the inevitability of increasing social convulsions, but it doesn't explain why these convulsions can lead to communism. It is only because communism meets fundamental needs that flow from human nature and that are blocked by capitalism, that it can become real. That human nature goes beyond "class," yet because of its position in society, only the working class experiences this conflict in such a way that its struggle can overcome the alienation that prevents communism's realization.

That we agree upon. In her latest text, Rose also expresses a more nuanced view as to the historicity of human essence. Despite her critique of my analogy between human essence and a person's growth, she develops a similar view, stressing that her position is not ahistorical, since she considers "that the very foundation of human nature is (...) in transformation". I agree, but this seems an (unexplained) turnabout from an earlier text in which she wrote: "there is no transformation of species being but of the social form in which species being expresses itself". The latter position is contained in her point of departure, the contradiction between a constant "species being" and a variable "social being." Despite the fact that the essence of our being is being social, social being is for Rose quite different from this essence. Not separate, though: she sees "no separation between species being and social being but a conflictuality between them". One can't exist without the other, but there is a contradiction between them that can only be resolved in communism. Then, presumably, species being and social being will be one.

So social being is the specific social form in which species being exists in any given period. A true self, deep inside, but mixed up and covered up by the alienations of that period. Rose thinks that humans under capitalism are increasingly alienated from their true self and as a result less and less conscious of their real needs. She also thinks that it is consciousness of those real needs that is the motor of communist revolution. How does the working class overcome that apparent contradiction? That question remains unanswered in her text. You could get away with it by claiming that revolution is not a conscious process, that the working class is driven by these real needs even while being less and less conscious of them, but I think that Rose would disagree with such a mechanistic view. It's true that the assault on those needs increases as real domination develops further and as capitalism's crisis intensifies, but that still doesn't explain how the fight to fulfill them can develop if the awareness of them continuously declines. I think that at least part of the answer is that increasing alienation is only part of the story of human consciousness under capitalism. At the same time, there was also a development of human nature under capitalism, of individual as well as social consciousness, the development of a rational understanding of the world, and this development has created a new potential that clashes with capitalism because the latter impedes its realization. I guess that Rose would answer this short-hand explanation, by saying that the only thing that changed was man's "social being," that his "species being" remained the same. I disagree. I think that the way in which humans collectively try to make sense of their world is integral to their collective consciousness, which is integral to their species being. What "species being" means to Rose remains, even after this text, relatively vague. She sums up some of its invariant characteristics: "the need for love, for recognition, for linkage, for belonging, for creativity, for knowledge..." but she has to recognize that this is only part of the picture, which leaves all contradictions conveniently aside, like a personal ad, so she clarifies that she doesn't mean that human nature is devoid of violence, aggressiveness and so on. But she suggests that "organized human society" holds this dark side in check. Yet it is also "organized human society" which actualizes this dark side, which is the main perpetrator of violence and cruelty. Rose further adds that it's not surprising that, with the dynamic of capitalist crisis moving toward massive devalorization, these violent manifestations of human nature come to the fore. I couldn't agree more. But that leaves the question of how revolutionary consciousness can develop wide open. We can't solve it by believing that our true self will overcome alienation in the struggle and liberate itself. As attractive as this vision is, it does not do justice to the complexity and contradictory nature of our human essence, nor to the necessity for that true self to evolve, for collective consciousness to change as a result of the action and reflection of the working class. Barbarism realizes human nature as much as communism does, only different aspects of human nature which will make it evolve in a different direction. So the questions remain. We know that

capitalism's crisis can only deepen and that its impact will be increasingly violent and destructive. How will that affect class consciousness? Rose's approach has the merit of broadening the question, of seeing class consciousness as a manifestation of human nature, as opposed to a mechanistic, predictable, response to its socio-economic conditions. This is crucial because in our times more than ever, the working class is not only attacked as variable capital whose value and price capitalism seeks to push down the more it sinks into crisis, but also as humans whose habitat is threatened by capitalism's perpetuation and whose vital needs and potential increasingly clashes with the reality of capitalism in crisis. If we can get rid of the sterile framework of a constant species being and a variable social being, we can begin to examine which changes in the objective context affect which aspects of human nature and how that relates to the development of class struggle. The revolution does not so much realize species being, as it allows it to change in a certain direction, breaking the obstacles that stand between this change and the potential for it that has historically developed in our species being. The main obstacles are those that hold back collective consciousness, and class consciousness, which is its most promising part. The way we make sense of the world is a fight within our species being. That's why it's so radical. That's why a pro-revolutionary minority is so important. Whether our species will recognize, in the face of the mounting absurdities of capitalist society, the necessity and possibility of revolution, whether it can fit that into the way our collective consciousness makes sense of the world, and thereby shapes it, is not a given.

Sander

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Reply #2:

## An Innate "Human Essence" Would Be A Straitjacket

In her "Return to the Debate on 'Species Being,'" Rose has clearly indicated the stakes of this discussion: what is it that will propel the working class to revolt against its very conditions of existence? We all agree that a devastating economic crisis, even one that plunges the working class into an unprecedented misery, is no sure basis for the emergence of a revolutionary class-for-itself. Indeed, as the 1930's demonstrated, and as the current power of nationalism, racism, and xenophobia, show, those conditions could even consolidate the power of capital. It seems clear that Rose bases her vision of the appearance of "revolutionary man" on the existence of a purported "species being" which lies below the encrusted layers of our "social being," the forms of subjectification

[assujettissement] that capitalism has impressed on the working class, and which constitutes the basis from which the working class can launch a revolutionary challenge to capital. That concept of species being is one that the young Marx, the Marx of the 1844 Manuscripts, articulated. It is a concept that owes much to both Hegel and Feuerbach – and it is a concept that I believe Marx largely came to reject because it is rooted in *metaphysics*, and constitutes a direct challenge to the *historicity* of being that I believe is, and must be, the basis of a *materialism* worthy of the name. A thorough examination of both Marx's critique of Feuerbach, and the *insufficiency* of his so-called inversion of Hegel's idealist dialectic,<sup>5</sup> lies beyond the scope of this brief response, though it is an issue that I believe it is necessary to explore in depth at some time in the near future.

Rose both wants to insist on the existence of a species being, a "human nature," and to claim that its historical expressions are variable. However, what meaning can species being or human nature have if it is not *innate* and *a-historical*? And if the historical expressions of that species being are dependent on a changing "historico-social context," isn't this the very meaning of *social being*? It seems to me that if we are to escape the trap of metaphysics, then we must reject any concept of humankind as having a *fixed* nature. As a creature that constantly transforms itself, all visions of a *transhistorical* human being must be rejected. Indeed, the only form in which we can know humankind, once we reject the recourse to metaphysics, and an originary or founding subject<sup>6</sup>, is in its social being. That is precisely the basis for Marx's critique of Feuerbach, and, I might add, of the implicit autocritique of his own position in the 1844 Manuscripts. So, in the original version of his "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845), Marx controverts Feuerbach and tells us: "But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is *the ensemble of social relations*."<sup>7</sup> Thus, only a year after articulating his Feuerbachian vision of humankind's species being, Marx recognized that the essence of man is to be found in his ensemble of social relations, that is, in his social being. In *The German Ideology*, written by Marx and Engels at that same time, Feuerbach is criticized for having posited "Man" instead of 'real historical man.'<sup>8</sup> So, where

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<sup>5</sup> See Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 102-103.

<sup>6</sup> Such a founding subject constitutes the basis of the concept of "man" that has shaped the capitalist epoch, from the Cartesian *cogito* to Feuerbach's abstract man, to Freud's image of man, with his innate "drives," to Levi Strauss's understanding of the invariant structure of the mind. The concept of species being articulated by Marx in 1844, seems to me to be still embedded in such a vision.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" in Karl Marx/Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Volume 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 4, my emphasis.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* in *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Feuerbach – and the Marx of the 1844 Manuscripts too – “stops at the abstraction ‘man,’ ” and fails to conceive of men “in their given social connection,”<sup>9</sup> The Marx of *The German Ideology* embarks on a vision of humankind as having no being other than its social being – a social being that is historically variable. It is just that vision that I believe is the basis of a materialist understanding of being.

Where, then, does this leave us with respect to the prospects for a revolutionary challenge by the working class to the social being of humankind in capitalism, with respect to the prospects for a human *Gemeinwesen*, for communism? In my view, we cannot count on a species being hidden beneath our social being to rescue humankind from the horrors of decadent capitalism. Rather, we must look at aspects of the social being that capitalism has impressed upon humankind, and especially upon the collective laborer, for the veritable basis for the revolutionary overthrow of the system based on wage-labor and value production. That social being, the mode of subjectification that now characterizes humankind, entails alienation and reification, but it also entails a potential for overcoming that condition. That potential, however, is not to be found in some innate species being that humans possess, but rather in the very contingent and historical conditions that have shaped our social being under capitalism. There are no guarantees here. Communism is not the outcome of some *teleological* process impressed upon the nature of reality, as Hegel believed, or as certain “Marxists” have claimed. Indeed, as Marxists have long known, for any mode of production, the class struggle can end either in revolution *or* the ruin of the contending classes, as Marx insisted in the *Communist Manifesto*, in socialism *or* barbarism, as Rosa Luxemburg recognized in the midst of the inter-imperialist carnage of World War One. However, the same contingent and historical process that has subjected humankind to the reification that is one hallmark of capitalism, also contains the possibility of revolution. Just as there are elements of our social being that trap us in our alienated state, and threaten to foreclose the prospect for revolution, so too are there elements of that selfsame social being that point towards the emergence of a revolutionary alternative to capitalism. As I indicated in my response to Rose’s first article on species being (see IP # 43), capitalism both constitutes humans as alienated and subjugated, and, at the same time, as a necessity of the process of value production itself, with its imperative of the development of the productive powers of humankind, is also compelled to historically concede a measure of autonomy and freedom to the subject, specifically to the collective laborer. Therein lies the basis for materialist *optimism*. A thorough evaluation of both the elements of our social being that point towards increasing barbarism, and those other elements of our social being that are indicative of revolutionary possibilities, is an urgent task for revolutionaries.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

## New Technologies and Communism



Connecting/ disconnecting...

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What will save us from digitalization? We can only applaud those hackers who prevent the patenting or licensing, i.e. the privatization, of a given discovery. That they devote all of their intellect to the development of free software, that they make no distinction between work and free time, is admirable. But the question remains: what will save us from digitalization? This is no witticism. The future society will benefit, will take full advantage of the possibilities provided by digitalization to archive, to foresee, to organize. But humankind, and its future, cannot be reduced to a better program, to better calculation. Man can be charted digitally: you can make predictions about sicknesses that an individual may get based on quantifiable factors. And we may soon have a genetic identity card, based on “cracking” the human genome. All that is both promising and frightening. But the debate takes us beyond all that. Humankind is not digitalizable, because it is first and foremost subjectivity, desire, intentionality. And those features are not subject to a plan or measurable on a bar code. According to R.V., the visibility of the revolutionary project will be augmented by abundance. Perhaps. Probably. But the goal of the proletariat is not to produce abundance, but because that abundance will make it possible for humankind to do something other than “produce,” something other than the development of technologies. By that, I mean that the vision of a world of objects, abundant though they may be, the vision of a world where there is even cooperation and the common use of resources, is not enough either to ignite the process of transformation of humankind’s relation to production or as a basis for a future society. We revolutionaries must emphasize that the trajectory of humankind is not reducible to the digital. That, quite apart from all the progress represented by digitalization, with its possibilities for genuine planning, there remains and must remain something specifically human: the unforeseeable, subjectivity, man (finally!) become the subject of his own history. And that, no one (not even hackers) can determine

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# New Technologies And The Visibility Of Communism

*This text was an oral presentation made at the meeting of the Francophone international discussion network [réseau] this past December. It is an integral part of the debate on technology and revolution that began in IP #44, a debate that has continued on the web site of IP. We have retained the basic form of the oral presentation, just as it was made in Paris.*

Why are we discussing this issue? In his text of May 5, 2005 [published as “New Technologies and the Visibility of the Revolutionary Project” in IP #44], R.V. says: “New technologies bring about a qualitative upheaval in the level of the growth of productivity, and thus in the possibility of a world without scarcity, where everyone can receive according to his needs and give according to his abilities.... The visibility of a project of a society freed from the laws of capital, which prevent such an outcome, would thus be enhanced. It is easier to dream of a world where goods are free when the necessary effort to satisfy human needs is being reduced at an accelerated rate, and when that becomes visible. But it is especially on the new social practices made possible by modern technologies that I would like to insist. ... I believe that there are two essential conditions: the first is situated at the qualitative level and consists in knowing how to recognize the authentically non-commodity, therefore non-capitalist, character of these practices; the second is situated at the quantitative level, and consists in seeing reality and the importance of its repercussions on social life within a temporal perspective of several years or even decades.”<sup>1</sup> Among the questions raised by R.V.’s text, an essential problem, “new” for the réseau, although one discussed for a number of years in publications like *Multitudes* and *Futur antérieur*, is that of the “free” reproducibility of software, of music, the whole issue of the *free* distribution of goods, made possible by new technologies. To use his own metaphor: it is as if one dug a well, and the oil gushed out in unlimited quantities. This kind of production/distribution without additional cost in terms of human labor could make the revolutionary project more “visible,” because it is synonymous with a possible abundance here and now. There are several issues that arise from this question: a) does “free” software escape the law of value? b) the growth of immaterial labor within capitalism; c) its implications for the processes of subjectification; the way in which the productive subject comes to conceive him/herself as a revolutionary subject

(its implications for class consciousness; d) the role of revolutionaries.

Does the production of digitalized goods “escape” the law of value because that production/reproduction entails no additional cost in terms of variable capital? If that is the case, what happens to the law of value, what role does it still play? In other words, does software (and in particular “free” software) have *value*?

Let me address this question in the most global terms: first, with respect to software, and more generally immaterial labor. The notion of exchange value entails a relation of equivalence between commodities, an equivalence based on socially necessary labor time (one measurable in *monetary* terms). The production of software therefore has an exchange value. By contrast, the copies do not, because their “production” entails no supplementary human labor. I therefore agree with Sander on this point.<sup>2</sup> The production of software, and immaterial labor as a whole, therefore, constitutes an expression of the trajectory of capitalism *towards* valueless production. The growing gap between use value and exchange value is the distinctive hallmark of *decadence*. In the ascendant period, the production of use value and exchange value went hand in hand; in decadence, the production of use value (material wealth) accelerates, while the exchange value contained in these products diminishes (*towards zero* in the case of software that can be copied). That growing gap is the source of extremely violent tensions: the destruction of stocks of commodities, wars, unemployment. It results from the introduction of science and technology into the very heart of the productive process. If the introduction of technology into production is a source of value, it nonetheless destroys more value than it creates: *it eliminates immense quantities of paid socially necessary labor, and consequently eliminates or reduces the exchange value of a growing number of products*. That tendency, though it has destructive consequences, also has a positive side: the very trajectory of capitalism tends to make exchange value obsolete, and creates – within the relations of production – a tension, a contradiction, that calls for its resolution through a system of production no longer based on the operation of the law of value.

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<sup>2</sup> See Sander, “Technology and Consciousness,” IP # 44. The reader can find an extensive debate on the value of digital goods between Sander, R.V. and Graham Seaman on IP’s website. [http://internationalist-perspective.org/IP/ip-iscussions/value\\_software.html](http://internationalist-perspective.org/IP/ip-iscussions/value_software.html)

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<sup>1</sup> IP # 44, pp. 20-21.

With respect to software, capitalism reacts by attempting to privatize, to make function “like capital,” what is not. The means are the legal “protection” of source codes that prevent the modification of software, licenses, patents, attacks on free software. That has made it possible to “commodify” software, to make it “seem as if” each copy had a cost. And that has made it possible for certain companies, like Microsoft, who have a monopoly (or a quasi-monopoly) to make enormous profits. But those profits are not, as is the case in the classical Marxist sense, the realization of a surplus-value (unpaid labor). Those huge profits are not an attenuation of the tendential fall in the rate of profit. The rate of profit is linked to surplus-value, that is to say, the ratio of paid to unpaid labor. In the case of software, that surplus-value is low, in the economic, Marxist, sense of the term, except, perhaps, for the *original* “piece” of software. That profit, which is called surplus-profit to distinguish it from the ‘normal’ profit that the capitalist obtains directly by exploiting labor, is therefore a way for capitalism to *ward off* the operation of the law of value (On this point too, I am in agreement with Sander).

More generally, the question of free software is linked to the growth of immaterial labor within capitalism, an issue adumbrated by Marx, and developed most recently by Maurizio Lazzarato and Toni Negri. Marx provides us with an indispensable framework: “But to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time, whose ‘powerful effectiveness’ is itself in turn out of all proportion to the direct labour time spent on their production, but depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production.”<sup>3</sup> Or “To the degree that labour time – the mere quantity of labour – is posited by capital as the sole determinant element, to that degree does direct labour and its quantity disappear as the determinant principle of production – of the creation of use values – and is reduced both quantitatively, to a smaller proportion, and qualitatively, as an, of course, indispensable but subordinate moment, compared to general scientific labour, technological application of natural sciences, on one side, and to the general productive force arising from social combination [*Gliederung*] in total production on the other side – a combination which appears as a natural fruit of social labour (although it is a historic product). Capital thus works towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production.”<sup>4</sup>

What is new, with the predominance of immaterial labor (like science and technology) is the possibility of sharing without loss, of reproduction without cost, of natural accumulation without debt with respect to past labor. This

is the case for philosophy, for science, and it is the case for software, free or not. The paradox is that capitalism more and more depends on certain aspects of such immaterial labor (science, technologies) to continue the accumulation process: the very condition for the development of capitalist accumulation, the condition for the development of wealth which remains based on the exploitation of living labor, more and more comes from immaterial labor, whose very nature is based on antagonistic principles (i.e. sharing without loss, reproduction without cost, natural accumulation vis a vis the past). To limit the effects of that contradiction, capital has developed the system of patents, and the licensing of intellectual property. “The battles over intellectual property are not limited to knowledge in the domain of health, and assume greater amplitude as the new information and communication technologies radically modify the conditions of the production and diffusion of all knowledge. The cost of the reproduction of software being virtually nil, only a “police” regime of control over respect for intellectual property rights can block the free circulation of knowledge, even as the extension of the duration of those “rights” slackens the rhythm of invention.” (Corsani & Lazzarato, in *Multitudes*) Within such a perspective, free software (that is, unfettered from the point of view of copying, utilization, transformation) is integrally linked to the very nature of immaterial labor. And the growth of the weight of immaterial labor in the global production process “prefigures” both the dissolution of the capitalist mode of organization, and the future social mode of organization, when humankind will have constituted itself into a “social body.”

“An economy of abundance does not mean that wealth is created without cost. On the contrary, the costs are exorbitant.”

Do we then share the position of Lazzarato and Negri: “At a time when capitalist control of society has become totalitarian, the capitalist entrepreneur sees his constitutive features become purely formal: in effect, he henceforth exercises his functions of control and surveillance from outside the productive process, because the content of that process increasingly belongs to another mode of production, to the social cooperation of immaterial labor.” (“Immaterial Labor and Subjectivity”) My own answer is: there where we see the possibility of contradictions, potential new fault lines, these thinkers already see islands of post-capitalist society, the constitution of a new society. I pose the question within the framework of immaterial labor because it seems to me that it clarifies the debate over free software, which is simply an aspect of immaterial labor. Some of the debates that we have had turn on the fact that if digitalization makes possible reproducibility without cost, it is linked to the utilization of computers, and other products, *that themselves must be paid for*. My answer to that argument is that no one is questioning that we live under capitalism, and that everything that we have, consume, even at the least cost, is integrated into a society based on profit, scarcity, and money. However, the growth of immaterial labor *within capitalist production itself* cannot simply be reduced to

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, Penguin Books, 1973, pp. 704-705.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 700.

that fact. That would be to foreclose the question before even raising it.

Now, to the impact of all this on subjectification. R.V.'s claims about free software pertain to the question of new social practices: "... whatever the degree of interpenetration with the capitalist world, whatever the effort to control them that they encounter, they constitute a qualitatively new reality, one that is different from commodity relations." (IP # 44, p. 22) According to R.V., these forms of cooperation show that "commercial exchange and the pecuniary search for profit are not the only motivations making it possible for humans to socially act and live together ...." (*Ibid.*) Those practices will expand as the network of those who utilize the Internet expands. Moreover, R.V. acknowledges that "non-commodity practices are only one part of the reality of the Internet, which, moreover, has become an indispensable means of trade and of the organization of companies and governments." (*Ibid.*) He poses the question: "Can these practices contribute to the generalization of a revolutionary anti-capitalist consciousness?" (*Ibid.*, p. 23) And the answer seems to be yes.

Once again, it seems to me that we need to situate this discussion in the following framework: *how can the growth of immaterial labor have an impact on the development of consciousness?* It's not just a question of hackers, or of those who use the Internet for "new social practices." But rather of understanding the impact of the evolution of the productive forces on the new fault lines, the new social ruptures; their impact on a possible generalization of class consciousness. If "*direct labor* as such cease[s] to be the basis of production ... if the product ceases to be the product of isolated direct labor, and the *combination* of social activity appears, rather, as the producer ..." (Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 709), and if the creation of wealth comes to depend less on labor time and the amount of time elapsed, as opposed to the power of the agents set in motion in the course of the labor process, there will be profound consequences at the level of subjectivity; with respect to the transformation of the subject in his/her relation to production. That transformation of subjectivity does not only concern hackers who experiment in the pleasure of "co-creating," of "developing," software without any barrier of code, and whose activity, as R.V. points out, refutes the idea that the individual can only be motivated by the quest for profit, or the desire to prevail in a competitive struggle. That transformation of subjectivity does not only concern the millions of Internauts, who surf, who communicate for free, who collaborate P2P, the examples of which R.V. has cited. The generalization of immaterial labor has other consequences, that affect the *collective worker*, the *new subject*, in a much more general way. On the one hand, immaterial labor is the product of human intelligence. Once again, we need to point to a paradox: capital, in order to accumulate, which requires the subjugation of man, is in more and more need of the products of the intelligence of that same man. On the other hand, the fact that direct labor shrinks in importance has as one of its consequences that the very terrain on which the

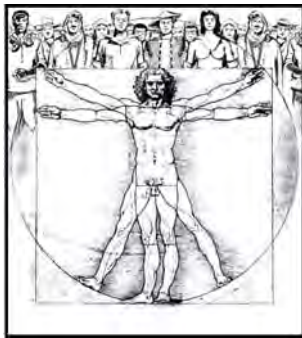
antagonism between capital and *labor* plays out multiply and diversify: the sites of resistance and revolt are multiple and heterogeneous, transversed by relations to the organization of labor itself and by social divisions; those who have never been integrated into social labor, and who probably never will be, constitute themselves into a subject *against* (capital), not on the basis of strikes or labor stoppages, but where they are, at the very sites where they live, and can thereby wield their power. The revolutionary process of the transformation of subjectivity will be propelled forward and will integrate all these factors.

Once again, I want to distinguish my position from those that assume that the process of the transformation of the subject in his relation to production has *already* occurred, as is the case for Lazzarato and Negri: "If labor tends to become immaterial, if its social hegemony manifests itself in the constitution of the 'general intellect,' if that transformation is constitutive of social subjects, who are independent and autonomous, *the contradiction that opposes this new subjectivity to capitalist domination ... will not be dialectical but from now on alternative. That is to say, this type of labor which seems to us to be both autonomous and hegemonic no longer needs capital and the social order of capital to exist, but immediately poses itself as free and constructive. When we say that this new labor power cannot be defined within a dialectical relation, we mean that the relation that it establishes with capital is not just antagonistic; it is beyond antagonism, it is alternative, constitutive of a different social reality. The antagonism presents itself under the form of a constituent power that reveals itself as an alternative to the existing forms of power. The alternative is the work of independent subjects, that is to say, they constitute themselves at the level of power [in the sense of *puissance*] and not just power [in the sense of *pouvoir*]."*" ("Immaterial Labor and Subjectivity") Or: "Free software makes possible the liberation of the forces of social cooperation within the market and within capitalist institutions, but *as forces that resist them and which can only be subsumed by capital at the cost of the loss of their creative power [puissance]*." (*Ibid.*) By way of response: as I've indicated, it seems to me that the growth of immaterial labor under developed capitalism has multiple and diverse effects on the collective worker (including those who will never have experience of the labor process). Class consciousness, under the form of *puissance* will be fed by all these effects, and not just by Negri's "mass intellect." However, that consciousness can only be defined in a dialectical – that is to say, contradictory – relation to capital.

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<sup>1</sup> Lazzarato and Negri here make a distinction that is clear in French, but not in English, between *puissance*, power *to*, as opposed to *pouvoir*, power *over*. French has two words to express the two meanings, English only one. Creative work is a *puissance*; domination of others is a *pouvoir*.



# Internationalist Perspective

*Internationalist Perspective* is a publication defending Marxism as a living theory, one that can go back to its own sources, criticize them, and develop hand in hand with the historical social trajectory. As such, if *Internationalist Perspective* bases itself on the theoretical accomplishments of the Communist Left, *IP* believes that its principal task is to go beyond the weaknesses and insufficiencies of the Communist Left through an effort of incessant theoretical development. *IP* does not believe that that is its task alone, but rather that it can only be accomplished through debate and discussion with all revolutionaries. That vision conditions the clarity of its contribution to the struggle and to the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat. *IP* does not aim to bring to the class a finished political program, but rather to participate in the general process of clarification that unfolds within the working class.

In its ascendant phase, the capitalist mode of production developed the productive forces to a very high level. The proletariat, through its struggles, could win durable improvements in its living conditions, and worker's parties and unions represented that possibility for struggle *within* the system.

As with every living system, after its phase of ascendance, the capitalist mode of production entered a phase of decline, generating the conditions for its own replacement by another kind of society. The decadence of capitalism has revealed the contradictions of the system in a stark fashion, and capitalism has become a fetter on the development of society. Today, when the productive forces have never in history been so advanced, capitalism hurls entire populations into insecurity, starvation, and unceasing violence.

The passage from the *formal* domination of capital (marked by the extension of the working day) to the *real* domination of capital (characterized by the thoroughgoing incorporation of technology into the process of production) has increased the productivity of labor, accelerated the development of capital, but has also led the system into crisis and profoundly modified the composition of social classes and the conditions in which they struggle. Permanent struggle *within* the system has become illusory, and the mass organizations of workers are totally integrated into the state, guarantors of social *control* and *cohesion*.

The proletariat by its very condition within capitalism is impelled to free itself from the alienation that capitalism, as a social relation, subjects it to, and is, therefore, the bearer of the project of a society freed from the law of value, money, and the division of society into classes.

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