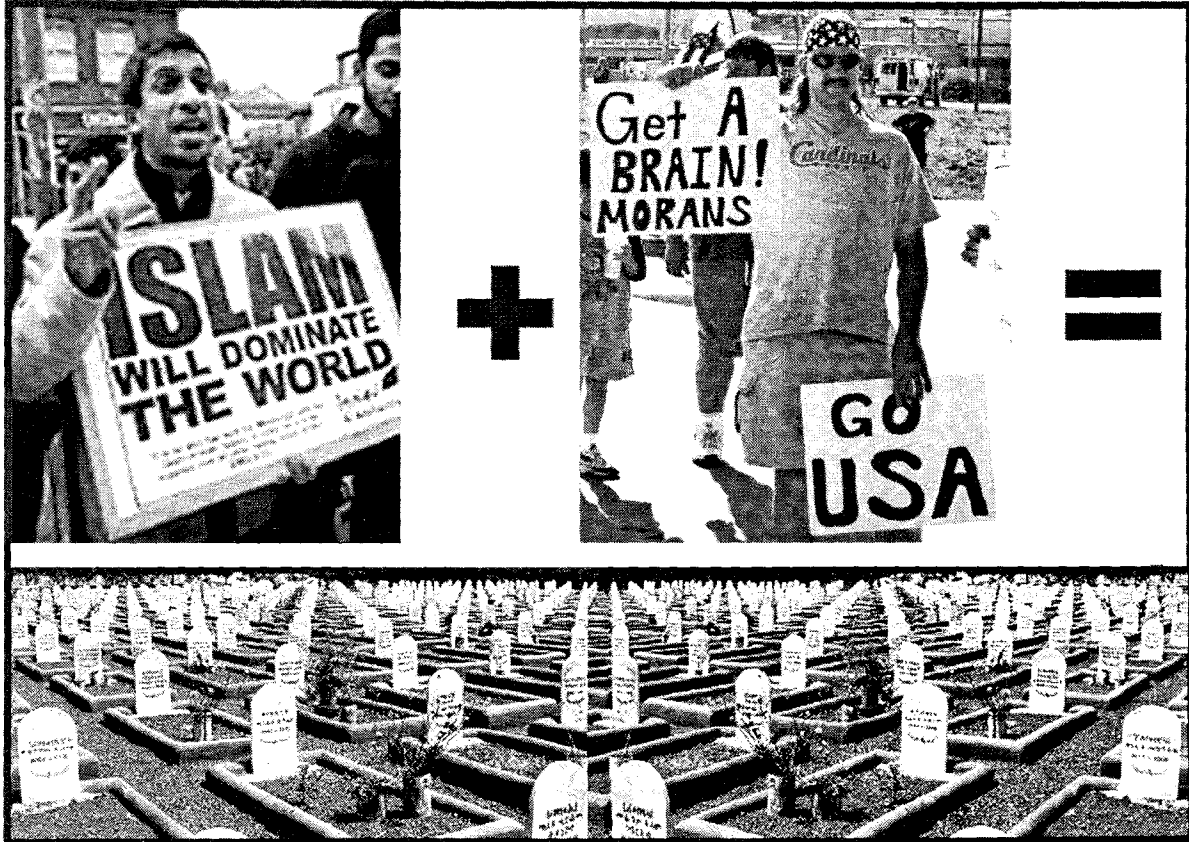


INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE



NO TO BARBARISM !

- Carnage in the Middle East
- 'Multitudes' or Working Class ?
- More Debate on Human Nature and Revolution
- After the Struggles in France

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Imperialist Carnage in the Middle East

While the recent carnage in Gaza and Lebanon has once again demonstrated both the willingness and the capacity of the Israeli regime to engage in indiscriminate killing and massive destruction in the service of its own imperialist interests, it has also revealed significant weaknesses in Israel's capacity to overwhelm its Arab adversaries or perhaps even to play the unique role of guarantor of American interests in the region. The inability of the Israeli military to crush Hamas or Hizballah, indeed the ability of those movements to continue to fight, despite the crushing military superiority of the IDF, has revealed a pronounced shift in the military balance in the Middle East, at least to the extent that Israel can no longer control events *solely* through its superiority in military technology (tanks, air power, smart and cluster bombs). Thus, where Israel sought to deliver a lethal blow to Hizballah in Lebanon by mobilizing a few thousand reservists, it has now learned that hundreds of thousands may be needed in the next round.

While events in the Middle East reveal that the dreams of the Bush administration, and the neo-cons who have shaped American foreign policy of late, concerning an unchallenged *Pax Americana* in the region are illusory, they in *no* way constitute defeats for *imperialism*. Imperialism is inseparable from capitalism in this historic epoch, nothing less than the overturning of the capitalist law of value and its operation can eliminate imperialism. Absent that, the local or even global conflicts that pit one capitalist regime against another, one nationalist political movement against another, are not *anti-imperialist*, but rather **inter-imperialist** – new and ever-more horrendous expressions of the *barbarism* of

capitalism in this epoch; conflicts that, by virtue of their ability to bind the masses to nationalist movements or nation-states actually strengthen and consolidate the class rule of capital. Moreover, at the present moment there are *no* real challenges to American *global* hegemony, though regional challenges, especially in the Arab-Muslim Middle East and Central Asia, abound. Iran surely aims to become a regional power in the Middle East, and its role as the protector of the Shia of Iraq, Lebanon, and potentially the whole of the Gulf, indicate the breadth of its reach. Syria too has regional interests in both Lebanon and Palestine, and, of course, is determined to reclaim the Golan Heights. The hesitations of NATO countries to commit the military forces needed to contain a resurgent Taliban in southern and eastern Afghanistan, the danger of a nuclear-armed Iran seeking to mobilize the Shia world, and the support for the Ahmadinejad regime on the part of Russia, China, and several European powers, especially France, all with significant trade relations with, and investments, in Iran, as well as the inability of the US to stabilize Iraq, where the bloody struggles between Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish militia spin out of control, all reveal the *limits* to American power in that strategically crucial region.

The ultimate sources of these limits are twofold. First, Washington is powerless against the deepening of capitalism's global crisis. This context on the one hand reduces the opportunities for productive investment and thereby stimulates capitals to quench their thirst for accumulation through military means; on the other hand, it provides them with cannon fodder in the form of an ever-growing mass of unemployed, frustrated young men. As long as the war does not reach a stage of total destruction, the ability

of regional capitals to rally a significant part of the local population behind their aims, compensates to a considerable degree for the lopsided advantage the US and its allies possess in military technology. Second, despite the fact that the working class struggle is defensive and relatively weak, it is not defeated. US capital cannot count on the docile acceptance of the proletariat of whatever course it drags society onto; it is not free to wage war in any way it wants. This too imposes limits to the means and efforts it can deploy to impose its military "solution" on the Middle East.

When one adds to the above problems that Washington now faces, the inability of Israel to impose its will on the Palestinians or to defeat Hizballah, it is tempting to see a shift in the imperialist balance in the Middle East, a resurgence of those *imperialist* forces that seek to challenge the hegemony of the US in the region. In order to evaluate the imperialist balance in a given period, however, revolutionaries need to look beyond the immediate situation, and place events in a somewhat longer-term perspective. Hizballah's "victories," and even its financial and administrative resources devoted to rebuilding the shattered infrastructure of Lebanon, for example, appear to strengthen the hands of Iran and Syria -- Hizballah's military, political, and financial, backers -- in that country, thereby undercutting the gains that American imperialism made in Lebanon when the Syrian army and intelligence apparatus was compelled to withdraw as a result of the "Cedar Revolution," and the Siniora regime took power. The ability of Hizballah to unleash direct military operations against Israel, to act with impunity as a state within a state, and the failure of the Israelis to militarily crush Hizballah, *seem* to indicate a dramatic weakening of those forces in Lebanon that are pro-Western, and a concomitant strengthening of the anti-American political wing of capital there -- with a resurgence of Syrian and Iranian domination. However, the situation may be far more complex than it first appears.

The financially powerful Sunni regimes, like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, frightened of growing Iranian/Shia influence in the Arab world, are preparing significant aid packages for the reconstruction of Lebanon, so as to compete with Tehran for political influence in Lebanon. Moreover, while the recent warfare has consolidated Hizballah's control over the 40% of Lebanon's population that is Shi'ite, to the detriment of the rival Amal movement, it has potentially alienated the 60% of the population that is Sunni, Christian, Druze or non-Arab. Indeed, Wally Jumblatt, the Druze leader has made it clear that he is determined to fight Hizballah for control of the country, and has been unabashed in blaming Hizballah for the massive destruction inflicted on Lebanon. In that respect, Washington is not without strong cards to play in the battle for control of that country. Indeed, the interposition of both the Lebanese army and a French-led UN force south of the Litani river, may, indeed, weaken Hizballah's power to operate with impunity in south Lebanon, and even limit the flow of weaponry from Syria to the Shi'ite militia. Even the way in which Israel laid waste to Lebanon indicates that it fought with at least one eye on consolidating those local forces opposed to Hizballah for control of Lebanon. The vicious pattern of Israeli bombing of civilian targets indicates that its objectives were exclusively Shia: the villages south of the Litani river, the Bekka valley, and the southern suburbs of Beirut, even as Christian, Sunni, and Druze population centers were carefully spared.

Beyond that, in evaluating the outcome of the recent bloody conflict, revolutionaries would do well to remember that whatever issues may pit Hizballah or Hamas against the interests of Washington or Jerusalem, those two movements constitute powerful bulwarks for *capitalism* against any possible *class* movement directed against it. Given their capacity to mobilize the mass of the population behind their religio-nationalist ideologies, Hamas and Hizballah may be among the most formidable ramparts behind which *capital*, and its barbarism, can take

refuge. In that sense, even American imperialism, and its Israeli deputy, may not

wish to see the power of Hamas and Hizballah destroyed.

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The analysis of Marx affirms in an explicit way that revolution is necessary and possible. Emancipation from capitalism means neither to free labor nor to redistribute wealth, but emancipation from those real abstractions, which are labor and value. Exchange-value tends to diminish, following the introduction of science and technology into production. It becomes possible to liberate oneself from value, from the concrete forms of labor, and the concrete forms of production and social life shaped by the abstract social structures based on value. We share Moishe Postone's view here: "Marx's analysis implicitly affirms that the form of industrial production based on the proletariat as well as on a crazy [*folle*] form of economic growth are shaped by the commodity form, and shows that the forms of production and growth would be different in a society where material wealth replaced value as the dominant form of wealth. Capitalism itself engenders the possibility of such a society, of a different structuration of labor, of a different form of growth, and a different form of complex global inter-dependence but at the same time it structurally undermines the realization of its own possibilities" It's not just – as the reformists think – a matter of reducing the duration of labor or installing a society of free-time. The slogans of the youth revolt in the anti-CPE movements that

proclaimed "neither unemployed, nor worker," that rejected exploitation in and by labor, are more clear than that, and have as their thrust a rejection of capitalism.

Some Concluding Words

To recognize the changes that have occurred since the 2nd world war in the way in which capitalism has developed, to recognize the re-composition of the working class, to integrate the topics and the sources of existing social dissatisfaction in the advanced industrial societies, here are a series of objectives to which Marxism must be harnessed if it wants to contribute to the emergence of class consciousness. The groups and tendencies that try to theorize these changes are not lacking, and Hardt & Negri's *Multitude* is a real contribution to this process. But it is necessary to locate this effort within the framework of Marxism, by returning to the core of it, under penalty of blunting the edge of criticism. Failing that, H&N are likely to be only fashionable theorists, acclaimed at the time of their new publications, but quickly forgotten when the radical revolutionary movement develops.

J

Another Look at the Anti-CPE Movement in France

A New Generation Entered The Arena

In the last issue of IP, we discussed the movement against the “First Hiring Contract” (CPE) carried out by French youth. Today we wish to return to this movement more broadly, while reconsidering the general questions that it posed in connection with the current class struggle.

For IP that movement was unquestionably a movement of a part of the proletariat and, as such, it was a reaffirmation of the fundamental antagonisms between the classes. On the one side, there is a capitalist system which more and more openly shows the reality of its crisis, its functioning and its perspective: the total submission of each part of society to the law of the value entailing that labor power loses its human character and becomes an object that one uses, which one displaces, that one devalues and which one throws out according to the immediate needs of capital; a need to attack and to adapt labor power in an increasingly direct way to the urgent economic imperatives, with the consequences of insecurity, exclusion, impoverishment and flexibility which that implies. Modern capitalism no longer simply needs labor producing material goods, but also requires the production of immaterial goods and innovating projects on the technological and scientific level, which further increases the flexibility and the insecurity of a part of living capital. We are seeing the constitution of a stratum of highly trained proletarians, often working in an isolated way and engaged for only the duration of a precise project. The last bill on immigration presented by Sarkozy, perfectly reflects this increased insecurity and this flexibility. Against this system, we find a proletariat that refuses to subject itself to capitalist logic, through social movements, which, if they are unable to shape a common

perspective, nonetheless reflect the development of a climate of tension and social agitation that is perceptible throughout the world.

In positioning itself directly in terms of a rejection of insecurity, the student movement marked its refusal of submission and adaptation to the ineluctable logic of capital. The ruling class has clearly understood this: in the commentaries of the bourgeoisie of other European countries, the point which was, and which continues to be emphasized, is the need for adapting to the changes that have transpired, agreeing to say good-bye to the old forms of work, “comfort” and social protection... In this way too, the ruling class shows how it more and more intends to treat its living capital and the student movement was a protest against that intention.

With respect to the anti-CPE movement itself, I would like to tackle four questions:

- * The class nature of the movement
- * Its characteristics
- * Class violence and the violence of the “breakers” [*casseurs*]
- * Perspectives

1. Class Nature:

The appreciation of the nature of class of the student movement has been debated within the revolutionary milieu: do the students



constitute the future ruling elite, are they a part of the middle class, and, in a more general way, how to appreciate the class nature of a movement?

Modern capitalism needs educated workers to use new technologies and we are far from the illiterate worker who extracted coal underground in a mine or even from the semi-skilled worker (the famous "OS" who had primary know-how). For example: Japan's Toyota is proud to have an educated labor force, with, at least, its diploma from high school. This need of modern capital involves a widening of the base of recruitment from higher education and in France the universities accommodate young people from all strata, amongst them, the proletarian milieu.

But, posing this question in a very general way, what does this term "middle class" still mean? The organization of the labor process has changed in a major way and the composition of the social classes as well. The proletariat saw its ranks swell by workers formerly a part of the middle class, but today proletarianized.

We touch here on the question of the recomposed proletariat, a class that was profoundly transformed in tandem with the transformation of capitalism. This gives us the image of a very heterogeneous class with respect to its sections and its forms of activity, as well as its status. The process of re-composition, while it is a global process, does not transform the proletariat in a homogenous way, that simply gives it another uniform shape, but rather has the

effect of dividing the class into multiple segments adjusted to the total process of production. This extreme heterogeneity is a basic given which revolutionaries must take account because it makes an appreciation of the nature of the class more complicated, and makes the sense of belonging to the same class more complex for this agglomeration of proletarians with multiple "faces." Meanwhile, the "middle class" that formerly constituted a very important intermediate social layer, especially in the rich countries, has been reduced to a significant degree in both number and social importance.

Moreover, it is not so much the social origin of these youth which gives them their class membership, but also the fact that they constitute the proletariat of tomorrow: the proletariat able to use new technologies, the proletariat shaped to the needs of capital, this last being, moreover, increasingly present in the definition of teaching curricula and research projects joining together private universities and private enterprises.

2. Characteristics of the movement:

Even if France - which seems, in this respect, to be in a particular dynamic - has already known several student protest movements, youth, in a general way, has shown little inclination to express itself on the level of reflection, of engagement and of action in opposition to the system. It is rather like a product of modern capitalism: individualist, immediatist and in hyper adaptation to socio-economic conditions. And if the period of adolescence was previously that of total revolt and total struggle, today's adolescents seem often less inclined to dream of another society. This youth has undergone the full impact of the historical break with the massive proletarian struggles of the past, with the great revolutionary movements, and the communist project is now more likely to be linked to the welcome bankruptcy of the old

Stalinist societies than to the hopes for a society based on new economic and social relations. The loss of illusions, the disgust expressed towards the political class, are not the elements that favor any kind of political engagement.

The first characteristic of the anti-CPE movement is that it hurled this new generation into the arena of politico-social confrontation. And even if, in France, it is not the first time, it is a fundamental experience that will leave traces in the lives of these future proletarians. Moreover, this movement was covered by the media in other European countries, thereby impacting the youth of those countries. For example, in Belgium, on the periphery of the May Day demonstrations, a group of young people demonstrated against insecurity.

A second characteristic, in direct connection with this, was the attempt to find a link to the work world. And even if this extension were not concretized, the students showed their capacity to identify their community of interest with the whole of the proletariat. When one knows the great difficulty that the class has in re-appropriating a common identity, beyond the very great heterogeneity of this re-composed class, we can only stress the importance of the capacity of these youth to have established a link between their struggle and the struggle of the remainder of the proletariat.

This experience was also that of self-organization. And, beyond the weaknesses, the naivety and inexperience of which the movement gave proof, there was this exercise of autonomous collective organization, of self-organization rather quickly and rather spontaneously put in place. And, once again, if one must emphasize the weaknesses and the difficulties of self-organization, nonetheless the attempt to keep the movement separate from the political parties and, related to the control of the movement, separate from the trade unions, the latter having unfortunately been present as the movement gathered

steam, should also be emphasized. The question of self-organization is a fundamental question for the development of a strike movement, not as a question of principle or a theoretical question, but as a concrete means to deploy the dynamics of opposition to the ruling class, a concrete exercise of confrontation and of its autonomy i.e. the organization of assemblies, a permanent mobilization, the manner of making decisions, the eventual material solidarity, etc. In self-organization, the workers overcome their status as isolated and passive individuals as well as their positions as objects of exploitation, which are those that capitalist relations of production assign to them. Indeed, it is the weight of alienation induced by the dominant social relations that explains the difficulty of any movement to be self-organized. This element of autonomization thus makes it possible for the strikers to realize in a concrete way the break with the logic of relations of domination, and permits daily lessons to be drawn from this collective and interdependent class activity: it is a fundamental element for the development of class consciousness. Workers are temporarily no longer subject to the law of the enterprise, to the specter of unemployment or to any other part of the capitalist socio-economic system; nor to the division of labor between specialists and non-specialists in the running of a strike -- a logic closely related to the maintenance of capitalist social relations. The question of self-organization is thus not just a condition of the success of a movement, but is also a fundamental political experience.

A third characteristic was the radical character of this movement: in their great majority, the student strikers did not yield to the fear of a degeneration of the movement which installed itself for the duration or to the legalist temptation of negotiations over changes in the modalities of the CPE, regularly proposed by the government and the trade unions. The demand was a straight "no" to this new contract and even after the withdrawal of it, certain students wished to

continue the movement to obtain the suppression of all measures of insecurity for young workers.

This radical character and this determination were also equally expressed for a minority of the movement by direct action (blocking of rail and bus stations, sections of road, occupations of buildings) and, again for some, by a direct confrontation with the police force. This is not about praising violence for its own sake, but rather of seeing these expressions as the manifestation of an irreconcilable antagonism between the classes.

This also marks an absence of illusions: many young people knew that the CPE was only the tip of a deeper social iceberg. And whereas the young people of May '68 could dream of a better future in the restructuring of capitalist society, the young people of 2006 have under their very nose each day the reality of the crisis, the absence of perspectives and the inexorable destructiveness of the ruling system. It is an element of differentiation between May '68 and March '06. A second element being, of course, the formidable worker's movement that developed in '68, whereas that was not the case this time.

It is necessary to emphasize another characteristic, the type of demand proposed by this movement: although organized mainly by students, nothing specifically "student" was asserted, like better quality of teaching, more profs, larger classrooms, etc. The young people opposed a contract governing their future conditions of work and thus placed themselves directly on the terrain of the class struggle.

A final characteristic of the movement was the popular support of the majority of the population from which it benefited, thereby indicating that it revealed a much more profound social dissatisfaction, going way beyond the framework of the CPE and situating it in the general context of working class struggles. And even if we did not see a

social movement of great breadth, it is necessary to point out that the direct actions, as well as the demonstrations, mobilized up to 3 million people. This is well beyond a trade-union demonstration or a single-issue mobilization, but is indicative of a profound social strain.

It is always difficult to make an "objective" assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of a movement. The appreciation that one in fact makes, depends on the political positions which one defends and thus, in a way, on what one thinks of the historical perspectives at stake, as well as on the expectations and hopes that we place in the working class in response to our anguish about the future. This can generate two very different visions: the tendency to misinterpret the movements, to see them as an immediate forerunner of a period of revolutionary confrontation; or, on the contrary, to be permanently disappointed by a class which would not do what it was supposed to do, to save us from the inexorable descent into the hell that capitalism has prepared for us.

For IP, a protest movement, the entry into struggle, constitutes one moment of rupture with the capitalist logic of functioning and, in that, contains a potential dynamic which must be pushed as far as possible. It is also in this moment of rupture that proletarians leave their isolation and undergo the experience of collective action and collective reflection. It is thus a privileged moment for the assertion of a class identity, a community of interest and for the development of class consciousness.

To emphasize these aspects does not mean uncritically praising the movement, but consists in acknowledging a dynamic which is only present in this space of open confrontation between the classes. This is, in a more general way, linked to the conception that we have on the role of revolutionaries.

From this point of view, if one comes back

to the student movement, it is necessary especially to insist on the traces that this experience will leave in the memory of these young proletarians. Whereas the capitalist system imposes its logic like a steamroller, crushing any tendency to challenge it, the student movement has made us feel, together with its participants, that one could oppose that logic, attempt to organize an opposition movement, and to win a battle that at the outset seemed hopeless. We can also imagine that the hours spent in discussions during General Assemblies or all the moments of mobilization, despite all the weaknesses that marked them, were fertile moments of reflection about general social perspectives.

Among the weaknesses of the movement, one must be particularly emphasized: whereas an important mistrust was expressed related to the trade-union organizations, a refusal to entrust the direction and the organization of the movement to them, when it was a question of meeting with workers, the students left that to the trade unions. We know this tactic well, 1000 times re-used by the trade-union organizations of going in the direction of the movement – in this instance, the quest for solidarity with the workers – so as to once again seize this dynamic for their own purposes and to empty it of its initial meaning. The trade unions succeeded in taking over that link with the workers, thus creating a true cordon sanitaire around the student movement, in spite of the sympathy of an important segment of the population. If the students did not give the organization of their movement to the trade unions, they nevertheless were trapped in the dynamics of extension. As in many social movements, this strategy made it possible for the bourgeoisie to prevent a social spillover. Just as in the movements of striking workers, trade unions, if they are subject to mistrust, even to rejection, nevertheless still have, unfortunately, some good days ahead of them.



The trade unions were not the only ones to try to isolate the movement and the whole of the ruling class deployed all its ideological weapons to that end. As usual, the bourgeoisie used the good old formula of “divide and conquer”, also trying to prevent any understanding of the underlying causes at the origin of the movement. Thus, it presented the CPE as a necessary evil badly presented by an awkward politician, pointing to the passage of similar measures in other European countries; it tried to shift the issue onto the electoral terrain, and the opposition between two potential presidential candidates, so as to create an artificial tension around the CPE; it permitted violence around these movements, playing on the legalist concerns of some and trying cause a drop in general sympathy for the students; it played up the oppositions and brawls between pro and anti-blockers to try to divide the movement; it finally counted on the passage of time to try to blunt the determination of the students.

3. The violence of the capitalist system/class violence and the violence of the “breakers” [casseurs]

When one speaks of violence, it is first of all necessary to point to the fundamental violence exercised by the ruling class – a violence that has two components: on the one hand, there is the economic violence, that transforms living capital, in an ever more flagrant way, into a commodity that can be used and abused for the immediate needs of capital; on the other hand, there is

the violence exercised in the service of social control, in the use of which the ruling class has made great strides. The ruling class has, in this respect, multiple tools at its disposal: it can wield the direct violence of the police force, permanent humiliating controls against those with swarthy faces, curfew measures; or it can have recourse to its legislative arsenal, or to an increasingly thoroughgoing commodification which transforms labor power into disposable tools; or, in a general way, in the profound transformation of a so-called free and democratic society into a police state where the surveillance cameras, wide-spread police operations, phone-tapping, become standardized state practices supposed to protect us from terrorism, insecurity and drugs. Against all that, class violence expresses the irreconcilable antagonism between the two classes and marks a rejection of any social consensus. Class violence has taken forms and assumed expressions that compel us to rethink its parameters, and to contemplate the very diverse forms that violence can take in the future, all within a common perspective.

We have already evoked the increasingly heterogeneous character of the proletariat. The evolution of capitalism implies the increasing presence of masses of proletarians completely marginalized with respect to the circuits of labor, and for whom life and demands are not about the defense of a status, of prior gains, of a job, but whose refusal of their condition of being exploited is expressed by a violent rejection of the system that excludes them. What joined together all these parts of the proletariat is their refusal of their conditions of existence. But, different tendencies express themselves within this class, which has several "faces." Thus, if "traditional" demands assert their resistance to the degradation of their conditions of existence and work (maintenance of employment, wages, the withdrawal of new legal provisions, etc.), there are also, especially amongst the most marginalized strata of the

proletariat, an expression of the brutal rejection of their current conditions of existence, a brutal rejection which is expressed by the violent appropriation of what they do not have access to, or by the violent destruction of that which excludes them. But, whatever the type of violence, it is the product of the fundamental opposition to the functioning of capitalism, expressed on the specific terrain of these proletarians and with the means at their disposal.

During the anti-CPE demonstrations, certain students clashed with the police force, even if it we have to emphasize the minoritarian and isolated character of these confrontations. Suburban youth again expressed their violence and attacked at the same time both the demonstrators but also the symbols of wealth and the representations of their exclusion: cars, stores... That violence too was also relatively minoritarian. The action of the "casseurs" around the anti-CPE movement must be situated in this context because; even if it is apparent that certain violent acts were due to agitators, plain clothes cops, or petty delinquents, we must not allow the trees to hide the forest: those riots and that violence express the general social malaise and constitute a response to the daily violence exercised by the capitalist system.

Even if the two types of violence (riots or confrontations during movements) are the expression of the same malaise, they fit in two very different dynamics: the destructive violence of the suburbs is not about the advancement of a project, the violence of a class movement often expresses (but not only) a determination and a radical character in the will to reach a goal. Once again, if these two types of violent confrontations are expressed in different forms and on different terrain, they have a common origin and both indicate the perspective for confrontation between the classes. It is clear that the going beyond the separation of all these scattered expressions of dissatisfaction can only occur in the concrete development of the class struggle. As long as we do not have great

social movements as a springboard, we are likely to witness the continuation of the scattered and heterogeneous actions of the various parts of the proletariat and the multiplication of violent actions without precise goals.

4. Perspectives

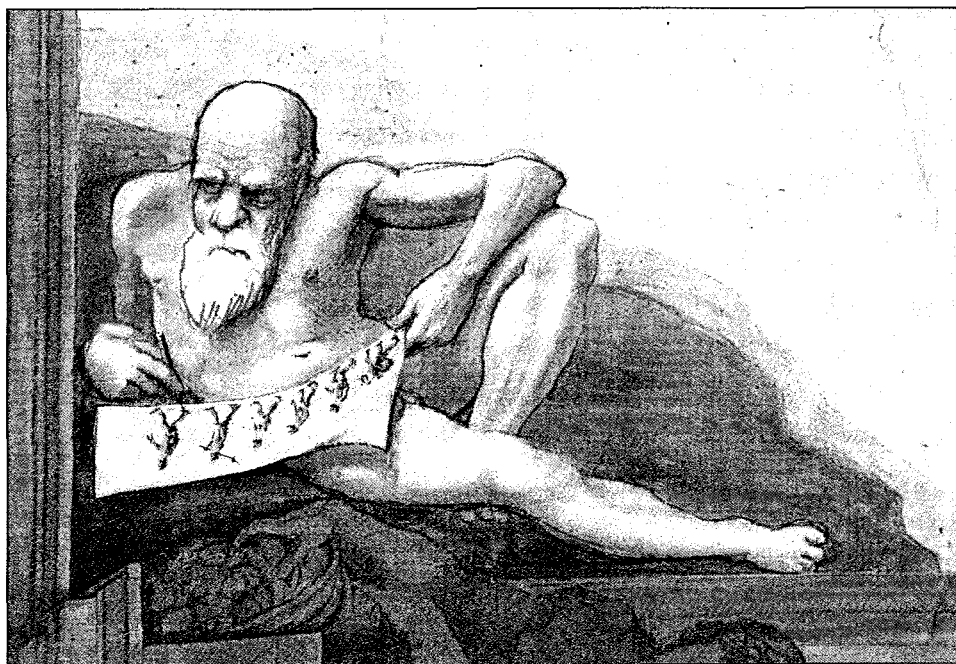
There remain many things to add and to discuss related to the anti-CPE movement. But significantly what will remain are the traces of this experience, especially in the consciousness of the youth. They are:

* That this movement is a movement of young proletarians refusing the insecurity and the impositions that capitalism imposes in an increasing way on their future. In that, this movement must be situated in the continuity of the fundamental opposition between the classes.

* Even if it is necessary to underline the weaknesses of this movement and, in particular, the fact that it could not extend towards other sectors of the working class and let itself be trapped by the tactics of the trade unions; that this movement, in spite of its determination and an unquestionable clearness, stopped after the withdrawal of the CPE law, it is especially necessary to underline its strong points, which are the experience of open struggle, of concrete and collective action, of self-organization, which will leave a fundamental trace in the dynamic of the advance of class consciousness.

* That this movement must also be linked to the riots in the suburbs last autumn, which we have analyzed in the last issue of IP, even if the radical character and acts of violence expressed very different dynamics.

Rose



The Debate on Human Essence: Round Three

In *Internationalist Perspective* #43, we launched a debate on “species being.” This is not an abstract debate, but an attempt to understand how, in a society crushed by the dominant bourgeois ideology and growing alienation, a project for a new society can emerge; how class consciousness develops. In this issue, the third round of debate, we publish four contributions - one by Max, a comrade from outside our group who understood the importance of this debate and wanted to participate in it. We encourage our readers to do the same.

‘Human Nature’ and Revolution

For two years now the comrades of IP have developed a debate inside their group on the “humanity” of man “Nature” against “essence” or “species being” in opposition to the “social being” of Homo sapiens: the bulky exchange of theoretical arguments to which this discussion is geared could make the sarcastic spirits (among us) smile, too quickly, inclined to see only a Byzantine gloss on the gender of angels; a revolutionary pastime of intellectuals awaiting the next wave of assault of the proletariat against the capitalist fortress. These good-hearted mockers should, however, take into account the objectives of this debate. They are indeed clearly declared by its protagonists (mainly Rose, Sander and Mac Intosh) and represent an exit from academism.

The goal of the debate, Rose wrote in her initial contribution in *IP* # 43 (autumn 2004), “... is to re-start the debate on class-consciousness. To take up again – as did Marx – the term ‘species being’ makes it possible to grasp the fact that the movement of the proletariat, in its thinking about the

perspectives for, and the construction of, a new society, is the result of the conscious action of our class, and, therefore, of both political reflection and willful action. This vision separates it from one that sees the revolutionary perspective as an automatic result of the growing pressure exercised by the economic crisis alone. The political action of the revolutionary class is the outcome of a process of questioning in which the degradation of its conditions of existence and political reflection intersect; it is rooted in the human needs denied by the functioning of capitalism. It is precisely through its efforts to satisfy its basic needs that the class can become conscious of the absence of any hope for their satisfaction in capitalist society, of its position as an exploited class, of its alienation within this system, and thus of the possibility of breaking loose from it. The process through which consciousness develops occurs by way of the exacerbation of the opposition between its social being and its species being – and it is these different notions that this article seeks to develop”.

In their first “responses” to the text of Rose (*IP* # 43), Mac Intosh and Sander mark a total agreement in principle with the initiative of their Brussels comrade and share its basic thrust: “Rose’s article”, writes Mac Intosh, “is particularly welcome, because it situates our discussion at the very heart of one of the issues that should most concern revolutionaries today: the development of consciousness. Moreover, there is no hint in Rose’s article of the economic reductionism that has haunted much of the communist left, and which has insisted that a catastrophic economic crisis -- provided it occurs at an historic moment when the working class has not been defeated and is not yet ideologically mobilized by the capitalist state -- will generate the class consciousness necessary for a revolutionary upheaval”. At the heart of his own response Sander is even more pointed: “We think that neither party nor crisis make the working class revolutionary. Does that mean that we don’t have to consider human nature? Or is the opposite true? If the working class doesn’t automatically make its revolution because its income and social security are collapsing and the party shows them the way, what does give it the will, the motivation, the insight, to do it? Don’t we have to look beyond the economic grievances of the working class to find the answer to that question? And does that not lead us to consider other core aspects of human nature in the working class that are oppressed by capital and that create the desire to break that oppression”?

In summary, the stakes of the debate, therefore, are to link the “desire” for revolution to fundamental needs inscribed in human nature. Here, again, is what Sander writes in his new article in *IP* # 45: “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”.

This demonstrates, I think, the interest of this discussion. I benefit from the opportunity to note that the articles in *IP*, although they are not specifically written for the network, actually relate to it in a general way. Many, it is clear, resonate directly with the discussions which are taking place within our collective. That we should take into account not only the contributions conceived for the network but, further, the texts (at least several of them) published in the reviews of the groups within the international collective, is indeed what the example of *IP* indicates (and that also goes for *Echanges* and *Movement* as well as for the texts of RGF, Jacques Wajnszstejn or Loren Goldner, and others too posted on various web sites). The resonance of which I speak is particularly manifest with regard to “human nature”, the subject of which, two years ago, occupied our attention. On the whole, one can even say that that moment in

the life of the network has reverberated amongst the IP comrades among whom, without any doubt, it already manifested itself.

I thus invite myself into the discussion within IP with the assurance of being well received. At the outset, I inform you that there will be no question of entering into all the ramifications of the discussion, in truth quite considerable. To do that would exceed in any event my capacities and I think it's more "beneficial" to limit myself to two points which I consider nodal, therefore, most important in my eyes, for the unfolding of the debate.

1. Species Being and Biological Being

Does there exist, "beneath social being", as Mac Intosh says, a "species being", a "human nature" or a "human essence" - unalterable so that the various historical forms of human socialization would be, through their very diversity even, its realization or materialization? These changing forms would always express the same generic principle. Mac Intosh disputes this theoretical position - which Rose defends -, advancing moreover that it would be alien to the thought, if not of the young Marx (Writings of 1844), at least for the Marx of maturity. Sander, for his part, though his position tends in the direction of Mac Intosh's, made some concessions, dare we say of a "centrist" type, to the position of Rose.

Let us acknowledge that it is not so easy to summarize the dispute. To begin, I believe that it is necessary to state the obvious. All the participants should easily agree on one point: the existence of a biological being of Man. This, without question, is unalterable, immutable. Invariant, at least as long as the human genome does not undergo a modification, as monsieur de la Palice would have written in his time. And if that was the case, it is, of course, even more so for the biological being that concerns us. We

have known, since Darwin and Mendel, the fundamental natural mechanism of this modification of genetic composition that results in speciation. Concerning all living species including humans, there is a response to exceptional conditions: gene changes on the level of an individual within a population, inside a species, and progressive diffusion of the new genetic characteristics if - and only if - the subject carrying the modifications and their descendants acquire from this a higher adaptive potential to the natural environment of the aforementioned population. Man, the development of his society and her capacity to adapt to external nature with the best interest of the needs that they themselves recognize, to some extent "disqualified" the Darwinian process, at least since the emergence of Cro-Magnon man, the only alternative hominid acknowledged today on the four corners of the Earth. As Sander recalls in his contribution - but it is well known - our biological core has not changed (or has changed very little) since the higher Paleolithic era, that is to say for a hundred thousand years. It is not that genetic changes ceased, but they no longer have any effect (they are not diffused). We are however, in 2006, on the eve of a crucial "revolution," that of the capacity to produce clones to replace the natural mechanism and to modify the human genetic inheritance directly. However, let us repeat, if this capacity is realized, the biological being that will result, will no longer be ours. Thus: the biological core of Man is, within his "nature", that which does not vary. Then, if species being is not identical to biological being, though it depends on it, despite everything (even Marx affirms it), what indeed can it be? It is what differentiates mankind from other animal species. The difference is already apparent (morphology, anatomy...) with the eyes and further with the internal medical composition (metabolism, biochemistry of the vegetative functions and, of course, genetics), and it is according to all that that the naturalists have defined the human taxonomy. But the real difference lies in the aptitudes for

consciousness, the consciousness of men and all that results from this on the level of their being able to transform the ambient nature around them and to develop complex modes of sociation. This human faculty would be unique in the whole of the animal kingdom.

If I use the conditional mode, it is because it is important, nevertheless, to be nuanced. The accumulation of scientific knowledge indeed obliges us today to limit this privilege to our species. Many animal species among the mammals and the birds, even the reptiles, develop rather elaborate social systems. A manifest sign of that elaboration is to be found in the co-operation between subjects, for hunting, for example, or the defense of populations against predators. One observes this among wolves, rats, as well as the raptors dear to Spielberg the film director, and, as Sander further points out, to chimpanzees. Beavers also join together to act on their natural environment. Co-operation unquestionably supposes a state of consciousness that manifests itself through a communications system (semiotic) between subjects. Man, it is certain, is the only animal to have a spoken language, but language, and the cognitive dispositions allowing it, are not his alone. Everyone is aware of the experiments carried out in laboratories with chimpanzees and which, successfully, demonstrate the presence of the aptitude for language in our close cousin primates: they cannot speak because the anatomy of their throat does not allow it; nevertheless, all that is necessary for language, and even a well articulated language, exists in their brain. Another famous example, are the dolphins, very social animals which are able learn, by a system of sophisticated whistles, complex rules without any human intervention. This learning is what we designate as training and man is far from being the only animal to practice it: from the window of my apartment, I often observe the relatively complex set of gesticulations and mimicry deployed by the parent pigeons in order to teach their young the art of flight. Such

examples can be found by any “scientific” amateur observer, without searching very far.

The arguments abound. Thus, the creative forms of intelligence must necessarily exist in the cerebral cortex of crows because these birds are capable of solving difficult problems consisting of untying small ropes set by men and thwarting all their traps. The fabrication of tools has for a long time been held as an unquestionable frontier (*Homo faber*) until one identifies this property of consciousness (or intelligence) beneath the human species, not only in fossilized hominids: *Homo habilis*, *Homo ergaster*, *Homo georgicus*...) but in primates (chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas). The faculty of modifying a tool, to improve its efficiency, according to particular modes of employment, and, according to the results of experimentation, to even manufacture a second tool starting from the first, is found in chimpanzees (in the laboratory, at least, because, within their natural environment, these animals do not exploit these possibilities; but they could). We humans also tend to consider cultural activities as the private field of our species; but the example, rather recently discovered, of certain African populations of elephants returning on fixed dates to pay their respect to their diseased forefathers seems to refute that prejudice: the metaphysical feeling of life after death in the milieu of the elephants, that a shocker, no?

What cannot be ignored is that many current biologists tend to appreciably reduce the gap between man and other animals. Put another way, to establish in a profound way what was not formerly tolerated (even by Darwin) man in her animality. Certain avant-garde thinkers today already propose that we accord the status of “person” to the chimpanzee and that we thus grant the rights as man to them! Joking aside part, what constitutes human specificity is defined now less by absolute originality than by a degree of development of consciousness, sociality, co-operation, language, etc. That said this

higher degree of performance is undeniable in humans. The really extraordinary evidence, to which Sander points, of that performance is what we can term species being, man's own "nature". Personally, at the risk of constructing a wobbly term, I would prefer to say: the generic difference of humankind is what is "most" specific about it.

2. Is species being immutable?

For Rose, the answer is yes. Admittedly, she says, species being can only be apprehended through social being; it manifests itself in our consciousness through changing social modes which are, at the same time, forms of transformation of the natural environment through an interaction between these two aspects. However, these changing forms fundamentally express an intangible generic principle; including -- and this is where it becomes complicated -- the dialectic, itself, if that term is to be preferred, when the changes are achieved to the detriment of species being. This has been the case since the origin of class society and the situation has only been made worse by the capitalist mode of production, which exacerbates the conflict to the n'th degree. But, according to Rose, the class struggle, over the course of centuries, has revealed the subjective existence of this primordial conflict between species being and its social deformations (alienation) as well as the permanent tension entailed in the resolution of those contradictions. All the human revolts against the ruling classes, the desire for communism that has been an element in the mental life of humans throughout generations since the Neolithic era, would consequently express the fundamental need of man to restore the truth of his species being. And even more, to realize completely the potentialities that this being contains. This is why, Rose insists, the proletarian struggle, its class consciousness, and I dare say, without betraying the thought of the comrade, cannot primarily be dependent on a reaction to the economic attacks of capitalism. It is clear: species

being, for Rose, is the foundation upon which the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat rests.

Mac Intosh as much as Sander (and I add myself) agree, saying with her, that indeed, the advance of the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat could not be reduced to "only increasing pressure exerted by the economic crisis" (Rose), even if it feeds off it (I leave aside here the problem of the party, on which I have the same opinion as the three comrades of IP). But as for connecting the aforementioned consciousness to species being, our two friends on the other side of the Atlantic show themselves more than circumspect. Mac Intosh, if I understand him well, is straightforwardly opposed.

As with the latter - but also Sander in another respect - I do not think that species being (to which Mac Intosh substitutes the concept "social being") is totally invariant. Like these two comrades, I think that species being (or "social," which I prefer) is on the contrary open, therefore modifiable, contrary to biological being. With the various societies that man has known through mutations in the modes of production, species being has changed. "Good" or "bad", the changes simply express social being and there is no conflict at the level of essence because this being in development contains opposing possibilities or in any case different orientations. All of these possibilities emerging, of course, from the transformation of man's environment, for which humans have become increasingly responsible in a direct way by substituting themselves for nature.

I am thus clearly opposed to the idea of the realization of an already finished species being, from the very origin of humankind, of which humans would be the carriers. This takes nothing away from our current aspirations for another society, more livable, more interdependent, more peaceful, than the horrors of capitalism, and for humans and their natural inheritance, to nourish

without having to respond to the injunctions of a program hidden deep in the unconscious. This “good”, this “better”, is what inspires our revolutionary action. It is not for sure that we will reach that point even in possession of the requisite means (we can also arrive in spite of ourselves at something which is not “good,” that we even consider “bad”), but that is what we must will. Now, to speak of the realization of an initial species being, comes back to what Mac Intosh calls philosophical anthropology and which, for my part, I called, in a former text - and in a little different context although connected - a “grand narrative” (by borrowing the term, from the comrades of Robin Goodfellow (RGF) who did not fail to link it to the “disreputable” bourgeois academics Lyotard and Derrida).

Rose’s is also a discourse that betrays her dependence on Hegel’s philosophy history, even with the Marxist inversion. That too, Mac Intosh emphasizes in his text in *IP* #43. However, this comrade seems to want to show that the mature Marx (*Capital*) overcame the young Marx, of the Writings of 1844, about which I am not sure, in any case not completely. But that is another question into which I do not want to (cannot) enter here. Without wanting either to widen the polemic, I would say simply that Rose’s vision of the realization of species being is close to the Bordigist idea of communism described as “knowledge of a plan for the human species”. Will RGF contradict me? I think that to relate the human trajectory to the execution of a plan or program whose essential bases are fixed at the origin of the human species is perfectly antithetical to the reality of our nature, which is what we would want describe as open and in constant construction. At this point of my text, a horrific vision of the future assails me: the image of a communist humanity subjected to the unfolding of five-year plans for the realization of our species being.

As a partisan species being in evolution, I would like, in spite of that, to object to

Sander’s vision of openness. The comrade (see the quotation that I cited in the introducing his position), describes it as a permanent tension, almost daily, of deconstruction-reconstruction of social being; he defines it as the species’ irrepensible need of change. That seems to me exaggerated. The openness of social being is not inevitably antithetical to periods of stabilization. It is important, for me at least, not to see the openness, the change, as a diktat, an injunction, like that of capitalist advertising, unceasingly provoking us to exit the routine of daily life and to release the brake on experimentation with the exotic “or unusual types of life,” all, of course, with the purpose of making us buy new commodities as well as the necessary equipment fitting the behaviour of artificially created roles.

Social being permits, indeed, “encourages” openness and change, but does not compel it. It is especially important not to attach social being by an iron law openness to “progress” (a systematic progression, in the sense that an ideology of progress understands it). In fact, the “advance,” in reality, can sometimes consist in a deliberate retreat relative to the previous human movement, or in any case to a readjustment, a voluntary reorientation, of projections for the future. Within Communism, in my opinion, we will see that. Therefore, to speak as Sander does, is, I fear, to return to a form of philosophical anthropology (to which Mac Intosh refers?). At the heart of the things, we would be back to Rose’s way of assigning to man an ideal of perfection to be achieved. But perhaps I did not understand Sander perfectly. That said, let me restate my position: if there is something indeed constant, of “trans-historical”, in man’s species being, it is, without playing on words, the possibility of his transformation.

I will end my text by an additional point that will bring together, I hope, the two preceding points. In the exchange between the comrades of *IP*, especially between Rose

and Sander, the question of determining the role of the biological in species – or social – being and thus of the determination of the second by the first, abounds. It is clear, for me in any case, that a biological determination plays a part and even Marx attested to it. As with the other animals that develop a sociality, the social exists initially in man as a biological impulse. Man does not discover nor does he invent social being as an experiment, after having been born; He does not decide to group together; He comes into the world with this biological determination. That is indeed why one can speak of the social nature of man. I have already also said, but I repeat it here, humans are not the only animals equipped with a social nature (to simplify the statement, I leave aside, the bees, the ants, etc, where the social behavior is coded in genes), but human social nature is much more marked and complex. On that basis, I then agree with Sander and Rose on the fact that what is crucial for us is not sociality in itself, but the forms that it takes. We have seen that, in man, these forms are changing, and I connect that to the open character of human nature. Indeed, I believe that this openness - but not its forms or its content - is biologically given.

Obviously, the question of species being takes us back to the old discussion opposing the innate and the acquired. It is clear that a long tradition in the social sciences - in the milieu of which I do not fear to locate certain current Marxists, including those of the communist left - privileged for a long time the acquired (training): the acquired was, said one, the indelible mark of humanity. Today, the scientific milieu is reassessing. As Sander emphasizes, our dependence on the innate is much more important than it formerly was thought to be, although the acquired remains predominant.

Among the comrades of the network, and I refer especially here to private discussions which I have had with Raoul Victor, resistance to this revaluation still remains strong. Which is not astonishing. Raoul, in

particular, readily defends against Darwinism the evolutionism of Lamarck, who, we know, places the acquired (determinant, it needs to be forcefully said, when speaking of the transmission of knowledge and cultural behaviors) in the center of his theory. Domi, in the same way, refutes the idea that language would be, as, in a very convincing way the linguist, Noam Chomsky, demonstrates, an innate structure of thought: the baby of man, said the well-known American, mainly does not learn how to speak by imitation of his parents (who, in any case, cannot teach the language to their offspring by grammar and syntax); he does it essentially all alone, and it is, so to speak, a superhuman exploit because language represents a colossal condensation of abstract principles. He reaches that point because his brain is pre-equipped (pardon me for this mechanical metaphor) for the training of language. Any baby of the planet can, nevertheless, integrate any human language (proof that all languages have the same fundamental structure, which corresponds to the structure of the apparatus of thought of the new-born, which came into the world amongst the Inuit or in Manhattan), or integrate none if the child is not incited to do so (which fully restores the importance of the social environment and the training of the child). Everyone knows in this respect the incredible history of Gaspar Hauser (Verlaine's "poor Gaspar"), in the 19th century, or the more modern study of the wolf child by Lucien Malson.

To return to the heart of my comments, we can acknowledge the importance of the innate character (thus biological) via the decisive proof that Sander provides himself (or indeed Mac Intosh, I have the gall to return to the texts in question to conclude my own), namely that, in spite of the formidable performances of our human nature, the complexity of our sociality, the heroic epic of our successive civilizations and our disorderly capacity "to humanize nature" (Marx); in spite of the monumental pedestal on which we perch our collective ego, notwithstanding our hypertrophied –

conscious consciousness, our imaginary poetry and luxuriant love ..., the paramount goal of our existence remains in the end the replication and the diffusion of our individual genes.

In the final analysis, the openness of social being is a strategy, a “ruse”, of biology to make us achieve its “intentions”. What, should be said in passing, does not mean in any way that biological engineering is unquestionably demonstrated. Actually, it “arranges” not badly (according to the pleasant expression of the Nobel Prize winner for medicine, François Jacob) and does not prevent fantasy (as the modern Darwinist theorist of evolution Stephen Jay Gould has emphasized. Let us propose the example of homosexuality, not taken randomly but because the discussion of it illustrates rather well the quarrel between the innate and the acquired. For many Marxists, homosexuality is completely a phenomenon of the acquired, concerning a psychosocial training missed or disturbed at the family level if not the moral effect of the decadence of a civilization, that of the Roman empire of Commodus for example. I am among those who think the contrary; that at least in part, it is nature that predisposes one to this behavioral deviance with respect to the biological requirement of

procreation. That is also found in nature that our species does not have, there either, the exclusiveness of love between subjects of the same sex.

I will pose finally, the final point by recourse to a very personal question: we speak about the latest possibility of modifying our genome (and thus to create a new species); and indeed, I wonder whether biological determinism by influencing us will really allow it. Its “will” in this field, the biological, will undoubtedly make us accept it as the result of the independent application of our humanist codes and feelings. Which leads me to this last reflection: our very biological determinism – have I convinced you? – has produced an open human nature, in a constant state of becoming. That means that we enjoy a great freedom, that our future - that our species being - depends on our choices, on our will. However, all the conceivable futures are not realizable for us. Only the futures in agreement with the characteristics of our biological inheritance are. In another way, we could say that the reconciliation of man with his nature is the exact comprehension of this, detached from any anthropocentrist prejudices: a free nature within determination.

Max

Humanity Becoming

It is worthwhile to reiterate the stakes of this debate, which is definitely not a philosophical discussion, but rather an effort to deepen our understanding of the conditions for the emergence of the political consciousness of the proletariat. In other words, how can consciousness develop in a society dominated by decadent capitalist social relations and the growing alienation that proceeds from them? We have already

introduced a number of answers to that question by articulating a vision of class consciousness developing in response to the impact of material conditions – the deepening of the economic crisis, the degradation of the living conditions of the proletariat – and of subjective factors. We believe that the economic determinant *alone* is not sufficient to provoke the emergence of a political consciousness. Our vision is,

therefore, situated at the cross roads between objective and subjective elements. To again take up the question of what provokes the proletariat to extricate itself from its own alienation is, therefore, a crucial question about our capacity to understand the dynamic of our class. The importance of that question is clear to a comrade outside our group, whose text we publish in this issue of *IP*.

A return to the debate on “species being”

Following the response of Mac Intosh to my previous text, which appeared in the last issue of *IP*, and which pointed out the bases for Marx’s critique of Feuerbach, the stakes of the debate have been clarified: the rejection of a static, idealized vision of a “finished” human being to which nostalgia would impel us to return.

I obviously share the criticisms of Marx, his defense of a materialist conception of history and his rejection of an idealist vision. In this sense, I realize that to use the term species being was inappropriate – because too time-bound – in a historical debate. Still seeking the most neutral possible term, I will thus give up this term “species being” in preference to “humanity becoming,” “humanity,” or “human essence.”

This debate between a materialist and idealist vision is still so current, that at certain moments it seemed to me that Mac Intosh was responding to someone other than me, attributing arguments to me that were not mine. It is equally clear that my own conception was expressed in a clumsy way, that it has evolved, become more precise, which makes the polemic difficult. But an element that appears clear to me is that I do not defend the idea of returning to a finished species being -- one having existed, for example, in primitive communism - which it would be a question of returning to. There seem to be two different levels here: on the one hand, that of the abstract notion of needs and human characteristics, and on the other hand that of the concrete form in

which these needs and tendencies find expression, according to the given material context. For me, the satisfaction of needs constitutes one of the motors of human activity. That quest is inscribed in the becoming of humanity, finding its concretization most completely in a communist society whose essence is precisely to satisfy these needs. To evoke those two levels, which are distinct, but in which one cannot exist without the other, means – for me – the human activity is situated and evolves in inter-action with its material surroundings; but it also means that humans have a capacity to shape their environment and not just to react to it – a set of issues to which I shall return in this article.

Another critique made by Mac Intosh is that defending this conception of the existence of “humanity”, of “human needs,” is a-historical. Expressing himself on the difference between the form and content of human life, Georg Lukács says in *History and Class Consciousness*: “On the contrary, history is precisely *the history of these institutions*, of the changes they undergo *as institutions* which bring men together in societies. Such institutions start by controlling economic relations between men and go on to permeate all human relations (and hence also man’s relations with himself and with nature, etc.)” (All references to Lukács are to *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971). (Here p. 48) For me, human beings, in the continual quest for the satisfaction of their human needs, are fully inscribed in an historical process, where they both are transformed and transform their environment.

The conditions of existence of the proletariat or the immediacy of social being

In the course of history, each society, created and developed the material conditions for its functioning and, in

parallel, the modes of relations and subjectivation which correspond to it.

But the capitalist mode of production (CMP) is characterized by having erected value as a sovereign, autonomous, law, controlling the whole of the economic, social and subjective processes, and which has alienated individuals in a particular way: by objectifying them like any other commodity, representing a greater or lesser value. The commodity relation structures all the forms of objectivity and all the corresponding forms of subjectivity, Lukács tells us in *History and Class Consciousness*. A world then arises of things and relations between things. It is to that world of frozen things that one can oppose the humanity of “man,” which is always *becoming*.

Within this system there exists a fundamental contradiction: the existence of the proletariat, the class necessary to its maintenance and its functioning and, at the same time, synonymous with its destruction and its overcoming.

But from this fundamental contradiction flow three others:

- * The subject/object opposition
- * The opposition between activity/passivity
- * The opposition between reaction/creation

In a certain way, these oppositions summarize the dialectical bond which links alienation and the emergence of class consciousness.

a) The subject/object opposition

For Lukács, man becomes an appendage to the machine in the production process, which has an autonomy from him. “As the product of capitalism the proletariat must necessarily be subject to the modes of existence of its creator. This mode of existence is inhumanity and reification.”(p. 76) “His fate is typical of society as a whole in that this self-objectification, this transformation of a human function into a

commodity reveals in all its starkness the dehumanised and dehumanising function of the commodity relation.” (p. 92) The development of the CMP thus implies a process of de-subjectivation of the human being in general and the proletariat in particular, placing this latter in a tension where subject and object are opposed in a dialectical relation: “The proletariat can and must liberate itself because when the proletariat is fully developed, its humanity and even the appearance of its humanity has become totally abstract; because in the conditions of its life all the conditions of life of contemporary society find their most inhuman consummation; because in the proletariat man is lost to himself but at the same time he has acquired a theoretical consciousness of this loss, and is driven by the absolutely imperious dictates of his misery – the practical expression of this necessity – which can no longer be ignored or whitewashed, to rebel against this inhumanity.” (p. 20) “From its own point of view self-knowledge coincides with knowledge of the whole so that the proletariat is at one and the same time the subject and object of its own knowledge.”(p. 20)

b) The opposition activity/passivity

In its reified condition, humankind is placed in a position of total submission vis-à-vis the machine, vis-à-vis the productive apparatus. It no longer controls it; it is controlled by it, like a built-in part of that productive process. “The contemplative stance adopted towards a process mechanically conforming to fixed laws and enacted independently of man’s consciousness and impervious to human intervention, i.e. a perfectly closed system, must likewise transform the basic categories of man’s immediate attitude to the world” (p. 89) “... the personality can do no more than look on helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system.” (p. 90)

The heart of the open opposition between

the classes is located here: if we insist so much on the importance of the emergence of a strike or any action of revolt on the part of the proletariat, it is because that represents a rupture with this position of isolation, with, as Lukács says, this contemplative attitude in which the reified worker finds himself enmeshed. In class action, the worker temporarily leaves her status as an object, ceases to submit and to be submissive, and also transforms his relation to other men in a dynamic, collective, becoming. Self-organization is the manifestation of the taking control of their own destiny by the workers in struggle, and it is that, even more than the success of the movement, that is crucial.

But true contradiction is that, to really become a subject of its own becoming, the proletariat must negate itself as class, and as individuals, defined by the capitalist social relation. It must negate itself in order to exist. "The reconstitution of the unity of the subject, the intellectual restoration of man has consciously to take its path through the realm of disintegration and fragmentation." (p. 141) Lukács also says "... the resurrection of man from his grave, all these issues become concentrated henceforth on the question of *dialectical method*." (p. 141)

c) The opposition creation/reaction

A fundamental question now arises: what is it that makes men struggle and what is it that makes this movement become creative and not only defensive or adaptive? This question is linked to two visions of history: either we think that the activity of humankind results from a continual adaptation related to its environmental conditions and we have a vision of a "reactive", human being, or we think that the human being is also unceasingly in contact with its human essence, its instinctual world and its psychic needs and is thus in perpetual search for the realization of its human existence, and we thus have the vision of a "creative" human being. Of

course, behind these two visions of man the debate between determinism and subjectivism reappears (which already was the subject of significant developments – see Daxa's text in *IP*) and especially, the original conception that *IP* defends related to class consciousness which is to precisely locate the connection between the material and subjective elements. It is insufficient to simply point out that the economic crisis is a fundamental element in the awakening of class consciousness in which the CMP engages humanity and in which the link can be established between the degradation of the conditions of existence and the functioning of the system. Nevertheless, the crisis does not necessarily provoke the development of the action of class solidarity of the proletariat and we must deepen the link between the relation of capitalist functioning and the revolutionary project.

The conditions for the emergence of class consciousness and of the revolutionary project or humanity becoming

Since the dawn of humanity, humankind has always been in movement, always sought to satisfy its needs and its human impulses. It is thus in constant interaction with its environment: to adapt and to modify it, but also to create it. And this last action mobilizes fundamental human tendencies: the capacity for reflection (which is the critical return of man to himself), the capacity for anticipation and projection in time, and the capacity for representation (to imagine and to build a project which would find a realization in the future), and the capacity to create bonds of solidarity with other humans. This component of human solidarity is the central point with respect to the revolutionary project. It constitutes the pendant – within the dialectical process – of the necessity for the proletariat to negate itself: affirmation (and solidarity) of the proletariat in its class action – negation of the class – transcending [*dépassement*] in the creation of new social relations and a new society. These points are fundamental

in the emergence of revolutionary consciousness and are situated in the movement leading to the simple awakening of consciousness of how things function with respect to the capacity of the proletariat to negate itself as category of capital so as to project itself into the construction of a new society. It is here that the objective and subjective factors come together: if the very existence of the proletariat and its class action are the result of economic processes, its necessary negation as a class is the fruit of its political consciousness, of its class subjectivity.

But Lukács establishes a tension between “social being” and “human essence”. For him, social being expresses the immediate situation of the proletariat. To this immediacy, I oppose humanity which falls under a historical dimension, in its becoming. But, Lukács tells us, “the transformation of the worker into a commodity destroys him, (...) atrophies and destroys his spirit but does not transform his psychic and human essence into a commodity”. I do not want to once again cite Marx describing the processes of the objectification of man, making him “alien to himself and to other men,” nor Lukács speaking of “the split personality “ of the worker or of the “split between objectivity and subjectivity in man objectified as a commodity.” For me, it is clear that there exists no possibility for the development of a revolutionary project without that capacity for reflexivity on the part of humankind, recognizing the gap between its social being and its human essence. Just as the shadows make possible a delimitation of the contours of light, I believe that it is objectification that makes it possible for humankind to feel that it is not really human in capitalism. It is in the growing de-humanization of capitalist society, that the need for man to find a way to express his humanity appears and comes together in a dialectical unity. These two moments come together in a dialectical

Rose

linkage, and the resolution of that tension can only be brought about in communist society. There is, therefore, a movement of transcending, and not a binary and fixed opposition between humanity and de-humanity. For me, that is the fundamental motor of human action. In that respect, when comrades – and one finds similar statements in Marx too – assert that the proletariat IS revolutionary and that it is that determination that will impel it, together with the degradation in its conditions of existence, to accomplish the historical task that is its own, I see a theoretical short-cut, that constitutes a determinist vision of history.

Perspective

It is in the proletariat that the essence of man, and its human needs, is denied in the most glaring way. And it is its particular place as an object for capital that enables it to become aware of this contradiction. The social forms rob man of his essence, Lukács tells us: “... they erect around themselves in the reality they have created and ‘made’, a kind of second nature which evolves with exactly the same inexorable necessity as was the case earlier on with irrational forces of nature (more exactly: the social relations which appear in this form).” (p. 128) What propels the proletariat to imagine, not simply taking the place of the bourgeoisie, but creating a society whose aim would be the realization of human needs is, for me, the capacity that humans have to “feel” their human essence, beyond their immediate social being, beyond the categories into which they are placed by the CMP. It is this impulsion of “humanity becoming” which makes it possible for man to measure the gap between its subjectivity (shaped by capitalism) and its needs, which propel it to seek something else. Therein lies the human essence of man, but its realization is always a process of becoming, ever in search of an expression in a social form.

Species Being and Class Consciousness

The discussion on class consciousness, re-started by Rose in *IP* 43 has in a vibrant way ranged over many issues and I want here to briefly touch on some of them.

For thousands of years questions have been posed about 'the nature of man'; answers – except for the religiously-inclined – have not been definitive. And, for Marxists, there is still the need for a fuller answer to the question: what is there in man – and specifically the proletariat created by capitalism itself – that is revolutionary and under what circumstances will it become a force for the transformation of society?

Only Social Being?

Everyone who has participated in this debate has agreed that man is a social being. I do too. But what else? Rose found it also important to stress the species being as used in Marx's 1844 economic and philosophic manuscripts – but she injected into her use of the term a dynamic view of its content including pulsions, drives and instincts. Sander considers that "(s)ince the specificity of humankind is its consciousness and consciousness develops itself, species being is necessarily a product of history, a work in progress. ... it's valid to speak of 'species being' because there's a collective consciousness of the species that is not unique to a class or a culture" but that Rose has a view of species being as stable and that she ignores its 'dark side'; he, on the other hand, says he would emphasize its instability. (I was surprised at his latter point since Rose dwelt on the tension between Eros and Thanatos –life/death drives.) According to Mac Intosh, "virtually the *whole* of our subjectivity or identity as *human* beings is historical, social, and cultural. 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 innate needs and drives, the *forms* that they take are not biologically given, but socially and culturally shaped, and historically variable." (Italics in original.)

Rose has now discarded the use of the term 'species being' and uses 'humanity becoming', strongly leaning on Lukacs' views on human essence from his *History and Class Consciousness*. Although Rose has elaborated further on its content I don't think it changes certain fundamentals for her: that man's social being is a concrete form of his abstract inner self described in terms of needs and human characteristics.

There are problems with all of these viewpoints. Rose's idea that social being is an expression of the abstract inner self is a kind of preformationism which implies that society is a macrocosm of the individuals within it. Human society, however, is much more than the sum of its individual parts. The society has institutions, culture, beliefs, rituals and a history all functioning together more or less harmoniously or antagonistically, and into this society, human individuals are born. No human infant could survive even one day outside this social existence; and conversely, the individual can only exist in a social structure because of his innate capabilities.

Mac Intosh's argument is problematic too. It seems to me that, by being "minimalist" on the innate, his argument goes close to the Lockean view of man as a 'tabula rasa', as a blank sheet of paper, which – although given a fillip by Pavlov's work on

conditioned reflexes in the 1920s – is not simply inadequate, it is wrong and misleading. The once-common statements to the effect that all human behaviour is learned or the idea that learning is primarily verbal are rightly weakening. Too much research has gone on in comparative ethology and neuro-ethology to ignore: there is a great deal active in man's behaviour whose drives come from his evolutionary history – much of which is not accessible by the verbally-active mechanisms in the neocortex structures of his unique brain, and of which man is often, if not usually or always, unconscious. These innate features are not just part of his evolutionary history but are part of his present, material, existence; they are distinguishable, but not separable, from social being - but they do not constitute an essence, nor a species being. The human-ness of mankind is the totality of man's inner and social being and it is in a communist society that this human-ness can, for the first time, have a positive self-conscious expression.

What is innate in man?

Humans are animals, mammals. The human infant's somatic structures go through a long period of maturation to produce manual dexterity, bi-pedalism and audio/vocal capabilities. The developed psychic structures contain instincts, drives and needs – as well as the functional means for highly-developed prosematic (non-verbal) and verbal communication, for abstract thought and the ability to share it. These structures are in evolutionary terms both primitive and 'modern'. Humans each contain the instinctual armoury and equipment to have enabled their past survival right up to the present day including: bonding with other humans and a capacity for love; inquisitiveness; capacities for courage, fear, aggression, rage, submission; the capacity and need for belief systems in order to function in complex and changing social and material environments;

and a consciousness strongly affected by the awareness of its own actions. Furthermore there is a capacity rapidly to develop and modify social structures. Many creatures have the capacity to build social structures, but humankind is unique regarding the degree and speed of adaptation of its social structures.

Human history brought expansion and extension of family and groups, then development into tribes and nations, all with their own differentiated structures. Further development of modes of social reproduction and of encounters (benign and hostile) led to interactions and regularized preparations for warfare, having profound implications for internal structures, divisions of labour and the relations between the sexes. The history of humankind has produced a multitude of social structures and cultures. Some have survived for long periods, developed and even been platforms for the transition to societies at higher cultural levels. Some have died – sometimes swallowed up, sometimes disintegrated, sometimes destroyed in war. Others just manage to keep going without any real development or even mechanisms to deal with their problems. In a sense, human societies have been like other natural organisms – trying to adapt in the context of an environment of fortuitous and adverse circumstances, in competition and in synergy with extraneous natural and social forces. Mankind has thrown up many forms of social being.

Along with these enormous social and cultural developments, humans have taken with them instincts, drives and even behaviours to all intents and purposes unchanged since early in man's existence. Thus the growing technical, social, intellectual and cultural achievements of mankind today co-exist with the most primitive and innate evolutionary acquisitions. When Sander says that "our biological inheritance gives us impulses and desires that are far too contradictory for any predictions on the future of mankind to be

based upon”, he’s right about predictions, but it would be wrong to conclude from this that the inheritance can be put to one side. On the contrary we must try to understand better the ‘stuff’, the raw material, of man

Divorcing the innate from the social being of man reinforces the divorcing of humankind from its biological and hence its animal - and specifically mammalian - connections to the rest of nature. Such a desire for putting distance between man and nature has always been strong in the Christian justifications for the whole Earth being put at man’s disposal by God; they were transferred to the justifications of the scientists of the 17th Century to appropriate and exploit the Earth and all that was on it as man saw fit. Such conceptions were eagerly taken up by the European ruling classes of the time as they were easily transferable to their ideological justifications for the ongoing exploitation of the working classes. To reconcile man with nature, man with animals, does not mean giving ‘human rights’ to chimpanzees; acknowledging the connections between man and the rest of nature is also to acknowledge differences and uniqueness.

My argument is not to change the starting point for the consideration of the development of class consciousness from the social being to the innate in man, but for the consideration of both together, each given its due weight. The breadth of issues for which this is necessary is substantial. Only with an appreciation of the innate psychic structures in man together with the conditions of his social being can we hope to understand fully the processes underlying specific social phenomena such as the behaviour of small groups or, to use a most extreme example, how it was possible for masses, crowds, of people to be manipulated for the most vile political purposes in Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Or, more contemporaneously, to understand the processes used in the production lines for the manufacture of suicide bombers (where they are not simply being coerced. In other

words, as the behaviour of man is not always under his conscious control, it is important for us to understand as fully as we can how, for example, a group or class may be manipulated by a ruling class. And in a more positive context, it can contribute to our understanding of the link between the consciousness and praxis of the proletariat, so that we can see the underlying processes, which can enable a mass of workers to turn into a single revolutionary entity.

Consciousness and Memory

We are not the only creatures with consciousness and memory; to point to only one consideration, an awareness of an external and internal world is essential to predation, to both predator and prey, and in many instances each requires an intimate knowledge of the other to survive. As noted earlier, we have a very specific consciousness linked to capacities not shared with any other species such as the need for belief systems, the extensive use of verbal communication and the development of abstract thought and the ability to share it. Furthermore, the extensive use of our ability to create our own means of subsistence and the artifacts of life reflects back on our consciousness very strongly; it is part of our functioning as human beings. These same faculties enable the transmission of experience and knowledge down the generations, and even across the centuries, and the building of a socially-based memory – in contrast to the personal, individual memory of each human being, the content of which is not inherited. The social memory - precisely because it is social – can, however, be broken and lost, corrupted or preserved according to the history of cultures. (Social memory can also be unconscious: for example, the memory of some events can be ‘stored’ in traditions, habits or rituals – even in gestures or verbal phrases.)

Distinctions have to be made between genetic, social and cultural dimensions of human existence in order to generate clarity on our understanding of human

consciousness, memory and that collective consciousness which results from an interaction between the innate capacities of man and his social being.

It is unclear where Mac Intosh's historical memory or Sander's collective consciousness reside. For Mac Intosh, "... the messianic tradition has been, and can be, a rich source for the historical memory of the working class ...", or "... that very element of freedom and autonomy, that has been the historical fruit of centuries of struggle against class oppression, and of working class struggle against the depredations of capital, the historical *memory* of which the collective laborer can draw on today, ..." (Italics in original.) Similarly, for Sander, "... there is a collective consciousness of the species that is not unique to a class or a culture. ..." and "(t) he way we experienced life under primitive communism, ..., cannot but have left deep imprints on our collective consciousness."

When we talk about the class consciousness of the proletariat, we are not talking about 'consciousness in general' nor people 'sharing' a consciousness as when the 'read' each other using all kinds of prosematic mechanisms. Nor is it just the daily awareness of social and personal existence that enables us to get on with life and to fulfil our given roles in socio-economic life. We are talking about the collective consciousness of a part of humanity in regard to its actual position in society and, in particular, its position in the process of production; more, we are talking about the process by which this class can realize its potential to revolutionize society. This collective consciousness, while coming out of ongoing social experience (like an 'old mole') can only develop openly at certain moments when the proletariat asserts itself in struggle for its own material interests.

Real Historical Man

There is no doubt that Marx's formulation of real historical man in 1845 is an advance over the species being of the 1844 economic and philosophical manuscripts. Nonetheless, many of Marx's insights, such as those on alienated estranged labour, expressed in 1844 stay with us and have lent themselves open to further development, so I'm not sure of the value of defining a young and a mature Marx; he always considered Hegel to be 'the master' and later in life still looked to Hegel's work for inspiration. Yes, errors and insufficiencies remained in Marx's work – but we don't need to search for a 'perfectly-formed' Marx. His was a living work and we have to take it forward, critically.

Taken on its own, species being has an invariance in it that should be rejected; however, there is much in the 1844 work to show that he saw man as a historical creature; and there is a tension between the two conceptions. Likewise there is a tension between Rose's use of species being and her remarks about the dynamics in man. But when Mac Intosh says it has led her to 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 ..." I think this is an argument too far. Nonetheless, while I agree with much of what Rose says about the condition of humanity in general and the proletariat in particular, I don't agree with the idea of a human essence generating a social form of being, one that then comes into conflict with that essence.

The social being of man has been markedly altered across historical modes of production and, with an unprecedented – and accelerating - rate of change throughout the development of the capitalist mode of production. But our social being today is not simply a creation of capitalism; a new mode of production doesn't just wipe Locke's slate clean or press a reset button. As the mode of production develops it alters existing institutions, destroys others, creates

now ones; ideologies are modified, subtracted from, added to and new ones created. This all tends to be pretty messy; residues from past belief systems mix in with the new. So today, in the 21st Century people have in their heads not just bourgeois ideology but superstitions, myriad religions and mystical beliefs from thousands of years past, self-contradictory ideas and pragmatic knowledge and skills for getting through the day. Marx was right to say that humanity must rid itself of this 'muck of ages' and that it was only in a revolution that it could do so and be fit to found society anew.

The Role of Crisis

Comrades have been at pains to stress that the mere fact of a catastrophic economic crisis will not generate in the proletariat a revolutionary consciousness. An economic situation that takes the proletariat to a long-term state of pauperization and misery can be the basis for nationalism, xenophobia and even fascism, and can contain more danger than opportunity. Where then is the basis for change?

Mac Intosh says that "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." (Italics in original) I don't have the same optimism in such a historic concession. Whereas there is a tendency in the system of production which recognizes a value to the 'freeing of creativity' under certain circumstances this is tightly circumscribed and there are many counter-tendencies towards more discipline. At the point of production or service in many areas there can still be as much mind-numbing activity demanded of the worker as ever there was. And insofar as in certain countries, conjuncturally, there has been

some latitude given to expressions of social discontent its continuance is not guaranteed and we can see across the world, under the guise of implementing measures necessary for the war against terror, the ruling class is strengthening its repressive apparatus.

I do not believe that there will be revolutionary change outside of circumstances that throw society into crisis, a profound, socio-political crisis that must surely have an economic dimension. Society will not change in a revolutionary way just because we want it to. It will only be changed because the present way of things will not work, the ruling class can't make them work and is seen to be unable to make them work, when the situation threatens to throw society into unrecoverable disarray AND there is a force in society that can be seen to provide a way forward – in other words, when the proletariat asserts its own power of which, previously, it was unaware.

It should be of little surprise that in man's innate structures we find material evidence to reinforce our political view of the importance of the proletariat recognizing its collective activity in struggle. Man's functioning in his highly complex material and social world requires a significant use of preconceptions in his mental activity and thinking processes; it's the mechanism ensuring that he is not overwhelmed by his own existence. Only a socio-political crisis can provide the means to undermine the cultural preconceptions that bind the proletariat to its place in capitalist society. Combined with the self-reflection of its open struggle, the possibility can arise for the assertion of its own power. Thus, the proletariat needs to see itself as a collective entity, with its own organs of struggle, to move forward.

Such a crisis could take many forms about which we can only speculate. Acknowledgement of the fact that we cannot predict exactly what this socio-political crisis might entail is not a deficiency of

knowledge but part of a rejection of determinism and a recognition of the

significance of contingency in mankind's history.

Marlowe

Class Nature, Not 'Human Essence', Should Be Our Focus

This debate does not derive from idle curiosity about humankind or consciousness; rather it stems directly from the desire to know more about our class and how the development of its consciousness takes place. Since WWI when Rosa Luxemburg made her now famous statement regarding "socialism or barbarism" the capitalist mode of production has continued its trajectory of economic crisis, genocide and permanent war, followed by one ecological catastrophe after another. This social retrogression has also been marked, especially since WWII, by extreme development of the productive forces, on the one hand, and the simultaneous ejection of millions of human beings from participating in the fruits of this development, on the other. Globalization has had a major negative impact on the proletariat's ability to recognize itself as a class, and therefore, to connect in unity and solidarity, not only as a class "against capital" but also as a class "for itself". The concern of this state of fragmentation and extreme heterogeneity in which the proletariat now finds itself is the fundamental reason for this debate in which IP is now engaged.

I wholeheartedly agree with Rose (and other participants of this debate) that a concept of class consciousness that is non-reductionist and non-orthodox needs to be elaborated; therefore, when she says that we need a vision that "... separates it from one that sees the revolutionary perspective as an automatic result of the growing pressure

exercised by the economic crisis alone", I join her.

What is practical necessity?

The idea that humankind changes out of practical necessity is put forth by ER in his text in *IP* #45, "On The Necessity and Possibility of Revolution":

"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".

This idea, that humankind changes out of practical necessity is, for me, a materialist concept. Going back in time, to the origin of language development, itself, that same

general notion of practical necessity was put forth by a Vietnamese philosopher, Tran Duc Thao, in the 1940's, reprinted in the journal *Telos* (ca.1980's), whose analysis, for me, was grounded in the Marxist/materialist method and described how the association of humans beings to each other and to their natural environment facilitated the development of speech. According to him, the process of language development (first the interpretation of gestures and from that rudimentary speech) originally developed out of the practical needs of the hunting party. Those who were more advanced in oral communication were those hunters who were in the rear of the hunting party as it was incumbent on them to interpret the gestures of the leaders, therefore, they had to "abstract" to a greater extent what the gestures meant as they could not actually see the tracks of the animal being hunted nor the animal itself. It was the task of conceptualizing and interpreting exactly what was happening that gave those in the rear the added impetus to begin speaking. The author theorized further about the events after the hunt, describing the reflection of the day's activities while sitting around the fire as the meat was eaten and shared as being a further motivation for language development. The event itself was both social and practical; however, at this point in the development of humankind, I would assume it was primarily practical, an aspect of the human species' association around their practical life activity, rooted in the desire to communicate for the practical good of the whole, ensuring a more successful hunt the next time, and therefore, securing a greater possibility of survival.

The whole notion of practical necessity related to the conception of language development cannot be proved but the theory put forth by the Vietnamese philosopher leans, I think, on the dialectical approach to explain the process of the development of language, rather than seeing it as innate as certain linguists do. While humankind today is far from the origin of its development, as the above-mentioned

example puts forth, the stakes of its survival and the survival of the biosphere upon which the human species depends has never been greater. The consciousness needed today to challenge these dire conditions in which the CMP has placed the human species relates directly to practical necessity and requires a political analysis of the totality of the current historical juncture. For me, an understanding of totality, as Lukacs writes of it, implies an understanding needed by the proletariat of their historical position in this process.

Totality/the dialectical method

My intention here is not to define or explain this method but to further explore what it is and what it is not as I understand it. Lukacs in his effort to explain the awakening of consciousness in the proletariat talks about the "transformation of the objective nature of the objects of actions..." and states "...the change lies on the one hand in the practical interaction of the awakening consciousness and the objects from which it is born and of which it is the consciousness. And on the other hand, the change means that the objects that are viewed here as aspects of the development of society, i.e. of the dialectical totality become fluid; they become parts of a process. And as the innermost kernel of this movement is praxis, its point of departure is of necessity that of action; it holds the immediate objects of action firmly and decisively in its grip so as to bring about their total, structural transformation and thus the movement of the whole gets under way" (emphasis mine) (*History and Class Consciousness*, MIT Press, p. 175). What is important here is the emphasis placed on praxis, not on an abstract human essence, as the point of departure, "the innermost kernel", of the awakening of the consciousness of the proletariat

The above passage means to me that the proletariat emerges in this process as both subject and object and creates in itself a synthesis, no longer objectified and alienated, no longer looking on in a

contemplative manner; it begins the process of knowing itself through praxis, through sensuous activity, as Lukacs describes it, and in the process of knowing itself, frees itself and humanity from the horrors of the law of value and all that that entails.

Lukacs also tells us that “history is essentially dialectical”, and that the changes in “reality can be confirmed at every decisive moment of transition” (p. 175). The importance of being able to elaborate these changes and transformations of the **capitalist mode of production**, along with its trajectory, is a practical necessity of the proletariat and its political minorities and should not be underestimated. This task is urgent and it is this urgency which motivates IP’s call for others to join us in this task of theoretical deepening and clarification.

Humanity becoming/human essence

In her text “Humanity Becoming”, Rose acknowledges the necessity to give up the term “species being” for the term “humanity or humanity becoming”. She then poses a ‘new’ problem to be considered. She poses two visions of history: “...either we think that the activity of man results from a continual adaptation related to its environmental conditions and we have a vision of a “reactive”, human being, or we think that the human being is also unceasingly in contact with its human essence, its instinctual world and its psychic needs and is thus in perpetual search of the realization of its human existence and we have the vision of a ‘creative’ human being”.

For me, opposing these two visions of history creates a false opposition, which does not take us closer to our goal to better understand how class consciousness unfolds. As the class struggles, as social protests explode, as social contradictions become more apparent to the proletariat, “reactive” activity by the class can become “creative activity” and vice versa. The distinction between reactive and creative activity is not hard and fast, they are different points on a

continuum. We need only to look at one of the major revolutionary upheavals of the 20th century: the demand for peace and bread, which Rose would consider to be reactive (or adaptive) but which eventually led to the overthrow of the Czarist regime in Russia.

Rose no longer defends the concept of species being...she now realizes that it is, indeed, an idealist concept. Rose’s initial conception has evolved from a static and invariable view of species being, to a species being that manifests itself only through social being, to, finally, in her latest text, “Humanity Becoming” (see this issue), ostensibly, into the conception of humanity becoming, historical and variable, developing and changing. But I don’t think she holds to that recognition as she continues throughout her text to refer to “human essence” which to me is just as much an idealist concept as species being. In fact, if there is a difference, I don’t understand it. And further, if humanity is becoming, the concept of essence, at least as I understand it, is constant, (see the discussion of “essence” in *On Dialectical Materialism*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p. 17). For me there is far greater value in describing the “nature” of the proletariat, derived from its social condition in the capitalist mode of production, which is what Lukacs does and whose work is quoted extensively by Rose - In fact, I don’t find the use of the term “essence” in Lukacs’ work, *History and Class Consciousness*, however, he does talk about the “nature” of the proletariat throughout. I would then ask why we need the term “human essence” at all. Marx said that man is a social being...it is that concept which I adhere to and which imparts to me the greatest potential for deepening the question of consciousness.

Rose is clear and eloquent in her description of the need for “rupture” and “open struggle” which allows the proletariat to break with the isolation that capitalist society imposes on it. I agree with her entirely on this point. But I truly don’t

understand how this dynamic process relates to “abstract needs” or “human essence”. I don't think we can wring an “essence” out of the proletariat, and to insist upon “human essence” makes one wonder if IP, indeed, should focus on a broader discussion of materialism versus idealism.

Necessity and Possibility

This idea of “necessity” (historical and practical) and “possibility” is not new and it is expressed below by Maximilien Rubel:

“So the proletarian revolution would not be a political adventure; it would be a universal act, carried out consciously by the immense majority of the members of society after they had become conscious of the necessity and the possibility of the total regeneration of humanity. As history had become world history the threat of enslavement by capital and its market extended all over the Earth. As a consequence there had to arise a mass consciousness and will fully oriented towards a fundamental and complete change of human relationships and social institutions. So long as people's survival is threatened by the danger of a barbarism of planetary dimensions, the communist and anarchist dreams and utopias represent the intellectual source of rational projects and practical reforms which can give the human race the taste of a life according to the standards of a reason and an imagination both oriented towards renewing the destiny of humanity”. (“Marx, Theoretician of Anarchism” in: *L'Europe en formation*, no 163-164, octobre-novembre, 1973)

In our efforts to rid ourselves of orthodox Marxist views which reduce the proletariat to a mere economic category which only reacts to its immediate problems of reproduction, to distance ourselves from a crude economic determinism, we have, in my opinion, gone too far in an opposing direction which has not, and cannot, bring us closer to the original question: what makes the proletariat, as opposed to other categories, revolutionary?

This discussion, for me, has become rather obscure when, on the one hand, the goal of our debate is to try to explain what provokes the proletariat to open struggle, to search for socio-economic solutions to dire global problems but, on the other hand, its focus looks to a human essence for these urgently needed solutions.

I agree with Marlowe when he says in his text, “Species Being and Class Consciousness”: “I do not believe that there will be revolutionary change outside of circumstances that throw society into crisis, a profound, socio-political crisis that must surely have an economic dimension...it [society] will only change be changed because the present way of things will not work, the ruling class can't make them work and is seen to be unable to make them work.....AND there is a force in society that can be seen to provide a way forward - in other words, when the proletariat asserts its own power of which, previously, it was unaware”.

For me, Marlowe envisions, along with ER (see my earlier quote from his text, “The Necessity and Possibility of Revolution”) a practical necessity which appears to be historically ripening in all four corners of the earth today and which may open the door to “possibility”. That is, “...to a force in society that is seen to provide a way forward...” There are no guarantees, we know, but, for me, it is in this direction of better understanding how practical necessity is unfolding and how it is envisioned by our class; it is in this process of historical ripening to which we must harness our theoretical efforts and connect them to the further deepening of this question of consciousness. Not in a determinist sense but in clarifying that which can provide an awakening of the consciousness of the proletariat to the obsolescence of the capitalist system today.

Carol

Letter: On the Practical Necessity of 'Real Socialism'

The article "On the necessity and possibility of revolution" in the previous issue of IP, evoked comments from Perry S., which we reprint below, with our response. In his introduction, Perry specifies: "When I use the term 'we,' I am referring to the positions of the CHicago REvolutionary NETwork, or positions that I know CHIREVNET comrades and our closest sympathizers would agree with."

We are in general agreement with the article, with the possible exception that the question of the necessity of revolution "...is really a philosophical one." (p.9)

We agree that the necessity of revolution is a practical necessity, given the "out of control" environmental degradation of the capitalist system in crisis. (p. 10). Global warming is an established scientific fact, etc., etc. Without real socialist revolution, world-wide, by the international working class, the Earth will become mainly uninhabitable for human beings. This is a key part of the practical necessity.

We use the term "real socialism" to distinguish what we are fighting against/for from all the fake "socialisms" or "communisms" that have ever existed/exist, which were/are state capitalisms, nearly all with the dictatorship of "the party" OVER the working-class, originating with Lenin. We have found that most workers we come into contact with, that are seeking a workable alternative to predatory, alienating capitalisms, are much less repelled by "real socialism" than "communism", the latter being a hot button turn off, such that discussion often comes to a standstill. (See our text: "What We Are Fighting For").

We strongly agree with ER's article that [international working-class] revolutionaries must consider both the objective and subjective conditions in a unified revolutionary theory. [p. 10]

Regarding the objective conditions, international capitalism in permanent crisis must inevitably lead to the "Greatest"

capitalist depression ever, sooner or later: because the means of production (which have spread to all countries world-wide) are "over-produced," and because of the colossal amount of un-payable debt by governments, corporations, and individuals that must be wiped out: this will result in the pauperization of the international working-class to an extent previously unknown.

Regarding the subjective conditions, this will lead the international working-class, which is basically pragmatic and not very theoretical, to conclude that "capitalism is not working", and actively seek a workable alternative that meets our needs. Here the capitalist ruling classes may try to play the "fascist card" again and/or the "World War card" again, somewhat similar to imperialist WWII. This massively destroyed the "over-produced" means of production, mainly in Europe/Japan, murdering millions of us "over-produced" workers globally in this despicable, anti-working class/anti-human, objective process.

Before fascism gained power, such as Hitler in pre-war Germany, before imperialist WWII started, the class struggle was basically in the subjective realm against these objective phenomena, but for some type of state capitalist "socialism". Once Hitler came to power, once imperialist WWII started, these phenomena became very powerful objective factors against the international working-class, which revolutionaries should have been struggling against subjectively all along by advocating

for genuine workers' revolution, which we call the real socialist revolution, in all the imperialist/capitalist countries without exception, including the U.S.! This should have been done mainly through clandestine activity.

This is why international working-class revolutionaries should be explaining to

workers now that "another world is possible" in a general sense and sketch this out generally and increase such propaganda and agitation a thousand fold once the "Greatest" capitalist depression ever hits catastrophically! Workers will be receptive to real socialist revolution then, especially if we "plant those seeds" widely now.

Perry S., Chirevnet, 8/25/06

Dear Perry,

There is much in your letter that we agree with. On your first comment, let me clarify that the question that the author of the article called 'philosophical' was: "what kind of necessity [of revolution] are we talking about?" As the article explains, the answer to that question depends on how one understands the world and historical change and is in that sense philosophical.

On your preference for the term "real socialism" over "communism" because the latter is such a "hot button turn off", we agree it may indeed at times be preferable to use less contaminated words if this helps to avoid misunderstandings. However, there are also people for whom "real socialism" is a turnoff too. And "revolution," "proletarian," etc. There are no words in the Marxist vocabulary that are not deformed and sullied by capitalist propaganda and Stalinist practice. Should we abandon them all, thereby depriving ourselves of the conceptual tools that they are for us, or find new words for them? These terms also connect us to the history of the revolutionary movement in which they acquired their meaning. We do not want to hide that we see ourselves in continuity with that movement, with the struggle for "real communism." That said, we agree that it is counter-productive to brandish "hot button-terms" in a sloganeering way, but we do not refrain from using them in a context that makes their meaning clear.

On your scenario for the future: we agree

with you that global overcapacity and "the colossal amount of un-payable debt" are telltale signs that a severe economic breakdown of global capitalism is approaching. However, we want to caution that there are many factors at play that make it hard to predict how all this will unfold. For example, will it "result in the pauperization of the international working class to an extent previously unknown", as you write? Today, the value of the commodities that constitute a worker's wage have dropped considerably, thanks to the growth in the technification of their production. This phenomenon is the reason why the general rate of profit tends to drop (the commodities contain less labor, thus less surplus labor, thus less profit) but it also makes it easier -- cheaper -- for capital to slow down this pauperization for at least a substantial part of the working class (and thereby divide it). It's therefore possible that a future breakdown would not lead to an absolute pauperization of the working class to the extent of past experiences such as in the 1930's, but would take other forms, equally or more threatening to the survival of the working class and indeed of all human beings. On the political reactions of capital to its breakdown too, we think we should avoid seeing the future as a repeat of the past. We agree that capitalism's crisis will make it increasingly destructive, that its underlying dynamic is towards the destruction of value to restore its capacity to accumulate. But whether that will lead capitalism, like the last time, to "try to play the 'fascist card' and/or 'World War card' again", as you write, is debatable. Some of

the issues concerning the forms that imperialism and war take in today's context are discussed in *IP* # 40.

We wholeheartedly agree with your conclusion that it's the task of

revolutionaries to explain that another world is possible and to sketch this out. But in order to do so effectively, they must understand it better. That is what *IP* tries to do.

Working Class or 'Multitude'?

Using the theory of the Mature Marx to criticize 'Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire'

Introduction

Major transformations of the recent past - the dismantling of the welfare state in the West, the collapse of the "communist" parties and Russian bloc, and the emergence of an apparently triumphant neo-liberal capitalist world order, have again brought to the forefront the problem of the historical dynamic and the possibility of world transformation.

The collapse of the Russian bloc, the definitive dissolution of the USSR, and the abandonment of the references to "communism" do not signify the historic end of Marxism, but rather the end of the radical deformations of it, according to which socialism is principally characterized by collective ownership of the means of production and by centralized production, by a mode of distribution regulated in a just and conscious way. This deformed vision of Marxism did not permit the critique of the "socialist" regimes. For those who kept their eyes open, the so-called "socialist" regimes were not a response to the problems of capitalism, since they were different from Western capitalism only by the introduction of centralized planning and state property. Even in the 1930's, Andre Gide, for example, in his "Return from the USSR" wrote concerning the Stalinist regime: "Yes dictatorship obviously; but that of a man, not that of the unified proletarians, of the

Soviets. It is important not to be deluded, and to clearly recognize: that is not what we wanted. Moreover we would even say: it is exactly that which we did not want."¹

To keep one's eyes open today, means to recognize the changes that have occurred since the 2nd world war in the way in which capitalism is valorized, the changes that have occurred in the working class, and the way in which the exploited can develop the revolutionary project, starting from an integration of the themes and the sources of social dissatisfaction: the decline in the number and power of the working class of the most industrialized countries, the dissatisfaction with regard to the existing forms of work, insecurity, flexibility, the increasing importance of the forms of social identity which are not based mainly on class, but also poverty, migrations, the development of xenophobia, ecological catastrophes, genocides, the ever-greater role of science and technology into the process of production, the privatization of what belongs to all, like genetic inheritance, the attempt to privatize collective efforts, like free software, etc.²

¹ Andre Gide, *Retour de l'URSS* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936), reprinted in Gide, *Voyages* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 418.

² See our texts concerning the debate on free software in *IP* # 44, Fall/Winter 2005, and *IP* # 45, Spring/Summer 2006.

Hardt and Negri (H&N), in their two works *Empire* and *Multitude*, elaborate a theory of these changes, in which they substitute for the old concepts of “nation-state”, of “working class”, of “communism”, concepts such as Empire³, the multitude, democracy. It is not our intention here to make an exhaustive criticism of the theories of H&N in *Multitude*: the scholarship of the two authors, the abundance of compiled references, the extent and the variety of the fields approached, the long intellectual course and militant history of Negri, make these theories both complex and extensive. We will limit ourselves to a discussion of three points: in the post-Fordist period 1) Does the production of value remain the goal of capitalistic production? And how to measure it? 2) Does the revolutionary subject remain the working class or is it the “multitude”? 3) Is the perspective for another society communism or “democracy”? Our approach will consist in showing 1) The specifically capitalist nature of the phenomena mentioned above. 2) The need to return to the theoretical core of Marxism, to the way in which it reveals the profound nature of capitalism, its social relations, its forms of domination, its historical dynamic, so as to account for the changes that have occurred. 3) That the new concepts of Hardt & Negri though radical in appearance, lack critical depth and, finally, only theorize their own impotence.

I: Does Value Remain at the Core of Capitalist Production? And How to Measure It?

Hardt & Negri affirm that: “In the final decades of the twentieth century, industrial labor lost its hegemony and in its stead emerged ‘immaterial labor,’ that is, labor that creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response Our claim . . . is that immaterial labor has become *hegemonic in qualitative terms* and

³ See our critique of *Empire* in *IP* # 40, fall 2002.

has imposed a tendency on other forms of labor and society itself. Immaterial labor, in other words, is today in the same position that industrial labor was 150 years ago. . . . Just as in that phase all forms of labor and society itself had to industrialize, today labor and society have to informationalize, become intelligent, become communicative, become affective.”⁴ “We will argue . . . that exploitation under the hegemony of immaterial labor is no longer primarily the expropriation of value measured by individual or collective labor time but rather the capture of value that is produced by cooperative labor and that becomes increasingly common through its circulation in social networks.”⁵



The ideas of Hardt & Negri are close to those of Andre Gorz, according to whom “...the expression ‘knowledge economy’ signifies fundamental upheavals in the economic system. It implies that knowledge has become the principal productive force. Consequently, that the products of social activity are no longer, mainly, crystallized labor but crystallized knowledge. That the exchange value of commodities, material or not, is no longer determined in the final analysis by the quantity of general social labor that they contain but, mainly, by the content of the knowledge, information, intelligence that they contain. It is the latter

⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), pp. 108-109.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

and no longer the abstract social labor, measurable according to a single standard, which becomes the principal social substance common to all commodities. It is that which become the principal source of value and of profit, and thus, according to a number of authors, the principal form of labor, and of capital.”⁶ “The heterogeneity of the activities of labor termed ‘cognitive,’ of the immaterial products which they create and the capacities and knowledge that they imply, renders non-measurable both the value of the labor-power as well as that of its products The crisis in the measurement of labor inevitably entails a crisis in the measurement of value. When the socially necessary labor time for a given production becomes uncertain, that uncertainty cannot but be reflected in the exchange value of what is produced. The increasingly qualitative character, less and less measurable, of labor, puts in crisis the relevance of the concepts of ‘surplus labor’ and ‘surplus-value’. The crisis of the measurement of value puts in crisis the definition of the essence of value.”⁷

It is easier to intuitively understand exploitation (and thus surplus labor, and surplus-value) when one sees images of lines of workers sewing trousers into jeans as in fact is the case currently in China, than when one sees images of robots who form assembly lines in a car industry, supervised by workers watching their computer screens. However, if one takes the broader vision of the total production of commodities, linked to the collective worker, and not the production of material or immaterial commodities related to the individual labor of each worker, there is no reason to doubt that capitalist production is still based on value linked to the extraction of surplus labor. The doubt and the incredulity of H&N (and Gorz) related to the concept of value in the period of the formal domination of capitalism would find an equivalent in the

fact of doubting the theory of gravity when one saw the first planes taking off.

An essential concept in approaching the evolution of capitalism in the 20th century is that of the passage from the formal domination to the real domination of capital. Marx had already, in his unpublished chapter of *Capital*, the “Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” traced in broad outline the essential characteristics of the passage to the real subsumption of labor to capital, which he calls the “specifically capitalist mode of production”, and implications of this passage for the social character of production and the emergence of the “collective worker”. “The *social* productive forces of labour, or the productive forces of directly social, *socialized* (i.e. collective) labour come into being through co-operation, division of labour within the workshop, the use of *machinery*, and in general the transformation of production by the conscious *use* of the sciences, of mechanics, chemistry, etc. for specific ends, technology, etc. and similarly, through the enormous increase of *scale* corresponding to such developments (for it is only socialized labour that is capable of applying the *general* products of human development, such as mathematics, to the immediate processes of production; and, conversely, progress in these sciences presupposes a certain level of material production).”⁸ “With the real subsumption of labour under capital a complete (and constantly repeated) revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relations between workers and capitalists.”⁹ “At the same time *capitalist production* has a tendency to take over all *branches of industry* not yet acquired and where only *formal subsumption* obtains. Once it has appropriated agriculture and mining, the

⁶ Andre Gorz, *L'immatériel: Connaissance, valeur et capital* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), p.33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

⁸ Karl Marx, “Results of the Immediate Process of Production” in Marx, *Capital: A critique of Political Economy*, Volume One (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p.1024.
⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1035.

manufacture of the principal textiles etc., it moves on to other sectors where the artisans are still *formally* or even genuinely independent.”¹⁰ “If the production of absolute surplus-value was the material expression of the formal subsumption of labour under capital, then the production of relative surplus-value may be viewed as its real subsumption.”¹¹ “The material result of capitalist production, if we except the development of the *social productive forces of labour*, is to *raise the quantity of production and multiply and diversify the spheres of production* and their sub-spheres. For it is only then that the corresponding development of the *exchange-value* of the products emerges – as the realm in which they can operate or realize themselves as *exchange-value*.”¹² “It is a form of production not bound to a level of needs laid down in advance (Its contradictory character includes a *barrier to production* which it is constantly striving to overcome. Hence crises, over-production etc.) This is one side, in contrast to the former mode of production; if you like, it is the positive side. On the other hand, there is the negative side, its contradictory character: production in contradiction, and indifference, to the *producer*. The real producer as a mere means of production, material wealth as an end in itself. And so the growth of this material wealth is brought about in contradiction to and at the expense of the individual human being. *Productivity of labour* in general = the *maximum of profit* with the *minimum of work*, hence, too, goods become cheaper. This becomes a *law*, independent of the will of the individual capitalist. And this law only becomes reality because instead of the scale of production being controlled by existing needs, the quantity of products made is determined by the constantly increasing scale of production dictated by the mode of production itself. Its aim is that the individual product should contain as *much unpaid labour as possible*,

and this is achieved only by *producing for the sake of production*.¹³

Through these extensive citations, we can see that in the sketch of the broad outlines of the development of the specifically capitalist mode of production (the antagonistic character of production, the incorporation of science and technology into the productive process, etc.), Marx gives a central role to the law of the value, to the fact that “each product contains as much unpaid labour as possible”.

Immaterial or “non-material production” is outlined by Marx, but in a very succinct manner. See “The Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” pages 1047-1048. Marx, in his own time, thought that that kind of labor, by its very nature, was located *outside* the relation between labor and capital. But that is no longer the case today.

Marx also tackled the question of the incorporation of science, and of knowledge, within the production process: “... *science*, which is in fact the general intellectual product of the social process, also appears to be the direct offshoot of capital (since its application to the material process of production takes place in isolation from the knowledge and abilities of the individual worker). And since society is marked by the exploitation of labour by capital, its development appears to be a productive force of capital as opposed to labour. It therefore appears to be the *development of capital*, and all the more so since, for the great majority, it is a process with which the *drawing-off of labour-power* keeps pace.”¹⁴

The implications for the definition of productive labor and more generally the working class are clearly shown by Marx: “... with the development of the *real subsumption of labour under capital*, or the *specifically capitalist mode of production*, the *real lever* of the overall labour process is

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1036.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1025.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 1037.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1037-1038.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1053.

increasingly not the individual worker. Instead, *labour-power socially combined* and the various competing labour-powers which together form the entire production machine participate in very different ways in the immediate process of making commodities, or, more accurately in this context, creating the product. Some work better with their hands, others with their heads, one as manager, engineer, technologist, etc., the other as overseer, the third as manual labourer or even drudge. An ever increasing number of types of labour are included in the immediate concept of *productive labour*, and those who perform it are classed as *productive workers*, workers directly exploited by capital and *subordinated* to its process of production and expansion. If we consider the aggregate worker i.e. if we take all the members comprising the workshop together, then we see that their *combined activity* results materially in an *aggregate product* which is at the same time a *quantity of goods*. And here it is quite immaterial whether the job of a particular worker, who is merely a limb of this aggregate worker, is at a greater or smaller distance from the actual manual labour. But then: the activity of this aggregate labour-power is its *immediate productive consumption by capital*, i.e. it is the self-valorization process of capital, and hence, as we shall demonstrate, the immediate production of surplus-value, the *immediate conversion of this latter into capital*.¹⁵

These lengthily quotations show that the increasing place of “immaterial work”, in the development of capitalistic production is thus not a new phenomenon, but rather a phenomenon which was accentuated at the end of the 20th century, and the beginning of the 21st. The question actively discussed today is to know if (and how?) immaterial work changes the concepts of value, of surplus labor, etc. Putting this question in perspective, it seems necessary to us to clarify the contradictory tendencies, namely

(a) generalization of the law of the value and the tendency to valueless production; (b) the generalization of wage-labor and the tendency to automated production, production “without workers.”

(a) Generalization of the law of the value and the tendency to “valueless production”

Value always indicates the exchange-value of one commodity against other commodities. It indicates the various quantities of various commodities against which a quantum of given commodities is exchangeable, i.e. the relation of equivalence of commodities compared to others. This relation is expressed in units of a standard commodity that is exchangeable against all others: money. In recent decades, a great number of activities or common goods have been transformed into commodities. This phenomenon was already outlined by Marx: “In capitalist production the tendency for all products to be commodities and all labour to be *wage-labour*, becomes absolute. A whole mass of functions and activities which formerly had an aura of sanctity about them, which passed as ends in themselves, which were performed for nothing or where payment was made in roundabout ways ... -- all these become converted into *wage-labourers*, however various their activities and *payment* may also be. And, on the other hand, their valuation – the *price* of these different *activities* from the prostitute to the king – becomes subject to the *laws that govern the price of wage-labour*. Now the fact that with the growth of capitalist production all *services* become transformed into *wage-labour*, and those who perform them into *wage-labourers* means that they tend increasingly to be confused with the productive worker, just because they share this characteristic with him.”¹⁶

Housework, care of children, maintenance of gardens, psychological consultations, tutoring, preparation of take-out food, the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1039-1040.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1041-1042.

examples are not lacking of work at one time expended without pay or remunerated in an indirect way, which today are the objects of commodity exchange.¹⁷ Even the common goods that, a priori, are not commodities, because are not produced for exchange, are confiscated by means of artificial barriers that restrict their use to those who pay for the right of access. That includes oxygen in very polluted cities, or the human genome code. Thus, for Gorz: “The privatization of access allows the transformation of natural wealth and common goods into quasi-commodities that procure a rent for the sellers access rights. The control of access is ... a privileged form of the capitalization of immaterial wealth”¹⁸ Immaterial work (for example in the form of software) constitutes one of the expressions of the trajectory of capitalism towards valueless production. This tendency results from the introduction of science and technology into the very core of the productive process. The introduction of technology into production makes it possible to save much more work than it costs. It reduces the potential for the creation of value, by saving enormous amounts of paid socially necessary labor, and thereby destroying or reducing the exchange-value of a growing number of products. This tendency has destructive consequences: destruction of stocks, unemployment, etc. It has also 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 which calls for a resolution by a system of production which is no longer based on value.

¹⁷ According to Edward Luttwak, “55% of the active American population work as sellers, servers, house-wives or house-husbands, household workers, gardeners, baby-sitters and day-care workers, half of them with no job security and low wages; more than a quarter of them living below the poverty line, even while working two or three jobs. Cited by Andre Gorz, *L’immatériel*, p. 53.

¹⁸ Gorz, *L’immatériel*, p. 36.

b) Generalization of wages and the tendency to production “without workers”

Within the capitalist system of production, more and more people appear as sellers of the only thing that they possess: living labor, i.e. their labor power. This is the consequence of the generalization of the law of value to all aspects of society. We have seen this process, for example, very clearly in China during the last decade, where peasants are driven from their land or abandon part of their family, to seek work in the cities.

In the last century, living labor could be generally integrated into the productive process and become wage-labor, taking part in the production of surplus-value and the self-valorization of capital. For Marx: “Thus productive labour is labour which for the worker only reproduces the value of his labour-power as determined beforehand, while as a value-creating activity it valorizes capital and *confronts* the worker with the values so created and transformed into *capital*. The specific relationship between *objectified* and *living* labour that converts the former into capital also turns the latter into *productive labour*. The specific product of the capitalist process of production, surplus-value, is created only through an exchange with *productive labour*. What gives it a *specific use-value* for capital is not its particular utility, any more than the particular useful qualities of the product in which it is objectified. Its use to capital is its ability to generate exchange-value (surplus-value).”¹⁹

In addition, the development of the productivity of labor has as a consequence an increasingly large proportion of “sellers of labor-power” who find no buyers, and are thus excluded, temporarily or definitively from the productive process: the unemployed over the age of 50 in the European countries, youth, etc. Even in

¹⁹ Marx, “The Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” pp. 1043-1044.

countries like China, unemployment and under-employment is widespread and growing. This contradiction between the generalization of the status of “seller of labor-power” and the contraction (relative, not absolute) of the possibilities for the incorporation of this labor-power into the process of production is significant, because it is one of the elements that may propel the development of a consciousness as to the obsolescence of the capitalist system.

The reason why H&N define the production of immaterial goods as “relations” or even “emotional reactions”, and value as something which is produced by “co-operative work”, “circulating within social networks”, are twofold: a confusion between value and social wealth, and a confusion between the production of social relations, emotions, and production of value. It is important to disentangle these confusions because that will make it possible to grasp essential aspects of present-day society.

1) The confusion between value and social wealth

For H&N, everything is productive. There is production of “value” everywhere and all the time. Value is produced by everyone, whether they are integrated or not into the productive process, including the unemployed, the clandestine immigrants (who find ways of managing to live). They see “production” as everything that is made in society, the production of cars, as well as the smile (or the absence of a smile) between the supervisor and his employees. If I speak, I produce value; if I keep silent, I produce value (the value of silence). We are all like Molière’s M. Jourdain, who composed prose without even knowing it. Does this framework really clarify anything? H&N make no distinction between value and material and social wealth. However, this distinction is essential to understanding why the enormous gains in productivity generated by capitalism led neither to increasingly high general levels of abundance nor to a fundamental

reorganization of social labor, involving significant general reductions in labor time. As Moishe Postone has written: “On the one hand, the tendency of capital to permanent gains in productivity creates a productive apparatus of enormous technological sophistication that makes the production of material wealth essentially independent of the expenditure of direct human labor time. On the other hand, that tendency creates the possibility of a reduction of labor time on the scale of the whole society and of fundamental transformations in the social nature and organization of work. However, under capitalism those possibilities are not realized. Although there is less and less recourse to manual labor, the development of a technologically sophisticated production does not free the majority of humankind from fragmented and repetitive labor. Moreover, labor is not reduced on the scale of the whole society, but rather unequally distributed, with an increase for many. The present structure of labor and the organization of production, therefore, cannot be understood solely in technological terms: the development of production under capitalism must also be understood in social terms. Together with consumption, it is shaped by social mediations expressed through the categories of commodity and capital.”²⁰

The trajectory of growth under capitalism is determined by the fact that the ultimate goal of production is to increase surplus-value, not the amount of goods. As Postone puts it: “In other words, the trajectory under capitalism must not be confounded with ‘economic growth’ as such; it’s a matter of a determinant trajectory that engenders a

²⁰ Moishe Postone, *Marx est-il devenu muet? Face à la mondialisation* (Paris: Éditions de l’Aube, 2003), pp. 33-34. This is a compilation of papers, which does not correspond to a work published in English. For a more detailed treatment of these issues, Anglophone readers can consult Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

growing tension between ecological preoccupations and the imperatives of value as a form of social wealth and mediation.” Labor under capitalism only appears to respond to human needs (“concrete labor”); in reality, as a true end in itself, it essentially serves the increase of value for its own sake (“abstract labor”). To cite Postone: “The abstract nature of the social mediation that underpins capitalism is also expressed by the form of wealth that prevails in that society. Marx’s labor theory of value has often been understood in a mistaken way as a labor theory of wealth, that is to say, as a theory that purports to explain the market mechanism and to prove the existence of exploitation by claiming that labor – always and everywhere – is the sole source of social wealth. But Marx’s analysis is not an analysis of wealth in general. It analyzes value as an historically specific form of wealth, a form linked to the historically unique role of labor under capitalism: as a form of wealth, value is also a form of social mediation. Marx explicitly distinguished between value and material wealth, and he linked those two distinct forms of wealth to the dual nature of labor under capitalism. Material wealth is determined by the amount of goods produced, and it depends on several factors, such as knowledge, social organization, and natural conditions, in addition to labor. Value, according to Marx, is only constituted by the expenditure of human labor time, and it is the dominant form of wealth under capitalism.”²¹

Value, the goal of capitalist production, thus remains completely bound to the extraction of surplus-value from human labor.

A direct derivative of the conception which assimilates value and material and social wealth is that which is used as the basis for demands for a “social wage”, or a “guaranteed wage”, like that put forward by L Guilloteau: “Against insecurity, it is for a social wage, one uncoupled from the labor time paid in an enterprise, that power within

the conditions of wage-labor can manifest itself. Everyone knows that the raises and the conditions under which the existing allocations are made, like the whole hierarchy of wages guaranteed by the state, are completely arbitrary. We need to find a form of access to material and social wealth that responds to the needs of occasional workers, those on reduced time, or still being trained. Since the creation of the SMIC in 1967, the socialization of a wage detached from one’s individual productive role has become evident. Production is directly social. Thanks to struggles against work, its character as a collective activity is in part remunerated. Social cooperation then ceases to be a free resource. If struggles for a guaranteed income follow the secular movement for a reduction in labor time, it is because they alone base themselves on the muddling of the old boundaries between time to live and time to work, transcending the classic distinction between production and reproduction. They alone respond to the reduction in labor time that characterizes insecurity.”²²

As Gorz emphasizes, the justification of demands for a “guaranteed wage” is contradictory. It is first of all a question of meeting “the needs of occasional workers”, detaching wages from “individual productive implication”. But we then quickly slide towards the idea that production has “become social.”²³ The wage then ceases to be unconditional, but is related to the remuneration of a “collective” activity, “social co-operation”. This example shows indeed to what extent these ideas lack a cutting edge, are not sufficiently radical, fail to put in question the capitalist system.

2) Confusion between immaterial production and production of relations, emotional reactions

²² L. Guilloteau, “A travail social, salaire social.” <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/A-travail-social-salaire-social.html>

²³ Gorz, *L’immatériel*, pp. 102-103.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

The fact that capitalism stresses social relations more and more, including within companies, or in relations with the potential buyer, as well as emotional reactions, is undeniable. However, can one say that when the ticket taker punches your ticket with a smile rather than with a sad air, there is production of value? Are advertisements for Nike, showing men or women running without being concerned about the state of the roads a direct production of value? Of what "value" do we speak? Of exchange-value, money and commodities, which is the only thing political economy knows? Or of what is intrinsically desirable, and, by definition, non-exchangeable as a commodity against other commodities?

Brand labels, advertising slogans, only affect the distribution of value, and not its production. They influence the choices that consumers make, within the limits of their purchasing power, which is determined by the value of what is produced. They stimulate needs, longings, self-images, the most adequate expression of which the commodity is supposed to represent.

The importance of this phenomenon has been well analyzed by Naomi Klein in her book *No Logo* (see also the detailed criticism made by *Aufheben* of H & N's concept of immaterial labor in no. 14, 2006).

II: The Revolutionary Subject: The Working Class or the Multitude?

H&N very clearly recognize the changes that have affected the working class in the Western countries, like the United States, and see in job insecurity, and flexibility, the new characteristics of labor power today. Thus, "... the compact identities of factory workers in the dominant countries have been undermined with the rise of short-term contracts and the forced mobility of new forms of work ..." ²⁴ To the question of who will be the revolutionary subject of the future, they respond with the concept of the "multitude:" "One initial approach is to

conceive the multitude as all those who work under the rule of capital and thus potentially as the class of those who refuse the rule of capital. The concept of the multitude is thus very different from that of the working class, at least as that concept came to be used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Working class is fundamentally a restricted concept based on exclusions. In its most limited conception, the working class refers only to industrial labor and thus excludes all other laboring classes. At its most broad, the working class refers to all waged laborers and thus excludes the various unwaged classes." ²⁵ "... there is a potentially infinite number of classes that comprise contemporary society based not only on economic differences but also on those of race, ethnicity, geography, gender, sexuality, and other factors."²⁶ According to H&N, the economic determination of resistance has given way to a political determination: "An investigation of economic class, then, like an investigation of race, should not begin with a mere catalog of empirical differences but rather with the lines of collective resistance to power. Class is a political concept, in short, in that a class is and can only be a collectivity that struggles in common."²⁷

The merit of this step is to want to break with an economic determinism that sees the possibilities of the emergence of revolutionary consciousness only as a reaction to economic attacks. But if the economic determinations are less apparent in society today that were right after the 2nd world war, they still exist, though on a more abstract level. Against capitalism, the working class consists of all those who have only their labor-power to sell.

We have already evoked the way in which Marx considered the consequences of the passage from the formal domination to the real domination of capital on the agent of the

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

²⁴ Hardt & Negri, *Multitude*, p. 105.

process of global labour, that is no longer the individual worker, but the collective worker. The passage from Fordism to post-Fordism had important consequences on the “self-awareness” of this “collective worker”. The development of job insecurity, the growing numbers of those working outside the law, the replacement of assembly line production by robots monitored by workers, etc, make the emergence of the consciousness of a common destiny difficult. But, rather than an “infinite number of classes”, modern society is moving towards a simplification: a growing percentage of humankind is being proletarianized, i.e. have only their labor-power to sell. The category of “labor” thus remains paramount, and, as long as capitalism exists, it will be the mediating category of social relations, as Postone points out: “Marx sought to situate the most basic form of the social relations that characterize capitalist society. That basic form is the commodity: a historically specific form of social relations,” one constituted by labor. “In a society where the commodity is the fundamental structuring form of the totality, labor and its products are not socially distributed through the means of non-disguised power relations, bonds, and norms, and traditional forms of domination – as is the case in other types of society. On the contrary, it is labor itself that replaces those relations by serving as a quasi-objective means through which one acquires the products of others. A new form of inter-dependence emerges in which no one consumes what he/she produces, but where the labor or the product of the labor of each serves as the necessary means to obtain the product of others.” Postone continues: “Thus, in the work of the mature Marx, the idea according to which labor is central to social life is not a trans-historical proposition. It is not linked to the fact that material production is a necessary condition for any social life. Nor does it mean that material production is the most essential dimension of social life in general or even of capitalism in particular. In capitalism, material production is linked to the

historically specific constitution *by labor* of a form of social mediation that fundamentally characterizes that society. It is on that basis that Marx established the socially essential traits of modernity.”²⁸

The question of those “excluded” from production must also be considered. The increase in labor productivity related to the introduction of technology and science into production results in a reduction in necessary labor time, and, therefore, in increased numbers of the unemployed, a greater mass of whom will never be integrated into the productive process, but who form part of the working class. The question of labor, far from having decreased in importance, remains, on the contrary, at the core of resistance to capitalism, and at the heart of the struggles to come. “Neither worker, nor unemployed”, was the slogan in the assemblies of young students (March-April 2006, France). We saw the emergence of a consciousness, among young people, future workers, concerning the system of exploitation based on labor, outside of which one is only trash, together with a refusal to blindly enter into that logic.

A related problem raised by H&N is the fact that the working class is recognized only when it is in action and it can measure the effect of its actions. Action indeed makes it possible to be perceived as subject, and to be distinguished from others. However action is not sufficient alone. When the young people of the suburbs were in action (November 2005), the young people of the universities and the workers did not recognize this movement as forming part of the working class (see the text of Rose in this issue of *IP*). Convergence in actions of resistance, of opposition to capitalism, necessitates a collective consciousness of that which unites, that is to say, a refusal of the exploitation through labor.

In addition, the tendency of the law of the

²⁸ Postone, *Marx est-il devenu muet?*, p. 10, my emphasis.

value to invade all aspects of social life is accompanied by the social basis of capitalism becoming ever-more fragile: cultural conflicts, ecological catastrophes, the demands of homosexuals, youth, students, all give the impression that revolt is everywhere (with very little in the factories). The question is posed of knowing who is the subject of the revolution to come. Is the notion of the working class a concept outmoded by history? What are the paths that revolutionary change will take?

III: Change: Revolution or Seizure of Power from Within?

H&N form part of a tendency that believes that revolution is no longer indispensable, that it is possible to change the world without seizing power, "... by voiding it of its substance, and de-legitimizing the power of the institutions and the powers that run them, by removing the growing space of autonomy from the planetary control of capital, and by re-appropriating that of which populations have been dispossessed. Everything happens as if the movement for free software and other movements, like "Reclaim the Street," "Ya Basta," "People's Global Action," "Un autre monde est possible," "Via campesina," or like the "Zapatista Liberation Army" -- which has never fired a bullet, but has succeeded in uniting dozens of other movements around a common charter -- were components of the same movement in a process of perpetual differentiation and re-composition, whose free networks would constitute a common matrix.... There would be no revolution thanks to the overthrow of the system by external forces. The negation of the system would burst forth from within the system through the practical alternatives that it generated...."²⁹

This conception is close to that of H&N in the third part of their book, entitled "democracy". H&N identify three types of demands (which they prefer to call "grievances") which cause oppositions:

those concerning representation (i.e. the lack of representation of total institutions like the Security Council of the United Nations, the IMF; those concerning right, justice, and economic poverty: "The average income of the richest 20 countries is thirty-seven times greater than the average in the poorest twenty -- a gap that has doubled in the past forty years. Even when these figures are adjusted for purchasing power ... the gap is astonishing. The construction of the global market and the global integration of the national economies has not brought us together but driven us apart, exacerbating the plight of the poor;"³⁰ and the biopolitical demands, among them ecological demands, which are necessarily of a global nature: movements against pollution, against rising sea levels which would entail the re-location of populations of several hundreds of thousands, or even millions, against the privatization of the human genome, of nature, and of the knowledge necessary to the production of drugs. H&N accomplish in this section a real effort of integration of the topics and sources of social dissatisfaction existing on a world level.

We think that these movements emerge in reaction to the trajectory of capitalism in its phase of decadence, which destroys the planet, accentuates economic inequalities, that plunders the resources of the countries of the Third World or those that are developing. These movements testify to the emergence of a consciousness that the "solution" can be only global, that a world government is necessary, which is concerned with the needs of humanity, and not capitalism's needs for profit. It is the new utopia, the new social project, which tends to be popularized through all these movements. But the idea that we could arrive there by an evolution that "would burst forth from within the system," by way of existing international democratic authorities who would make the economy function on the basis of a conscious

²⁹ Gorz, *l'immatériel*, pp. 96-97.

³⁰ Hardt & Negri, *Multitude*, p. 278.

revolution, clear on the principles of the abolition of capitalism, of wage-labor, seems to us to sow confusion more than anything else.

Alex Callinicos rightly emphasizes to what extent the autonomist ideology largely contributed to reducing the pacifist demonstrators against the G8 in Genoa in 2001 to the state of passive victims of police terror.¹ The Tutti Bianchi² had announced, before the Genoa summit, the obsolescence of the traditional left and the overcoming “of all the traditional oppositions of the 20th century: reformism versus revolution, the avant-garde versus the movement, intellectuals versus workers, the seizure of power versus the exodus, violence versus non-violence.”³ On July 20, 2001, the demonstrations of the Tutti Bianchi were the prey to violent police attacks that prevented them from reaching the red zone where the G8 summit was held: teargas, armored vehicles, tanks, bullets. One dead, several seriously wounded.

By praising the anti-globalization movements that “void power of its legitimacy without firing a shot,” because they only describe the visible movement and not the abstract contradictions that animate them, H&N risk finding themselves with affinities for ... the Social Democratic left. This latter can find in the theories of H&N a theory of globalization close to their own thinking, which helps them to transform them into public policy, since suddenly equipped with unexpected patents of nobility. And so the ideas of H&N easily be recuperated: “Thus, Mark Leonard, a

particularly crass Blairite ideologue, published an enthusiastic interview with Negri in which he praised the latter for arguing that globalisation is an opportunity for a left wing concerned with liberty and the quality of life, rather than for a reductive quest for equality between groups, which sounds more like Tony Blair than Toni Negri.”⁴

Other assertions show that H&N have less a revolutionary concern, i.e. for the radical change of society, than a concern to please the greatest possible mass. On the question of “reform or revolution”, H&N maintain that: “There is no conflict between reform and revolution. We say this not because we think that reform and revolution are the same thing, but that in today’s conditions they cannot be separated. Today the historical processes of transformation are so radical that even reformist proposals can lead to revolutionary change. And when democratic reforms of the global system prove to be incapable of providing the bases of a real democracy, they demonstrate ever more forcefully that a revolutionary change is needed and make it ever more possible. It is useless to rack our brains over whether a proposal is reformist or revolutionary; what matters is that it enters into the constituent process.”⁵ Worse still, they defend international courts, like those which were established to prosecute war crimes, “...as the first institutions of a global system of justice” !!!⁶

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¹ Alex Callinicos is a leading member of the British Socialist Workers Party. His article “Toni Negri in Perspective” has been published in *International Socialism* # 92 and is available online.

² Italian anti-globalization activists, who led the movement of 100, 000 protesters against the Genoa G8 summit.

³ “Why are White Overalls slandered by people who call themselves anarchists,” July 8, 2001, www.italy.indyedia.org

⁴ Callinicos, “Toni Negri in Perspective.” This is a lengthily and interesting critique of Negri’s concepts and contradictions, situated within the perspective of both his intellectual and militant evolution.

⁵ Hardt & Negri, *Multitude*, p. 289.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

Internationalist Perspective

Internationalist Perspective is a publication defending Marxism as a living theory, one that can go back to its 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 the 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 workers' 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. Indeed, the emergence on an historical scale of a new society can only be realized by the total negation of capitalism, and by the abolition of the laws that regulate the movement of capital. Such a new society entails a profound transformation in the relation of humans to themselves and to each other, of the individual to production, to consumption, and to nature; it entails a *human community* at the service of the expansion and satisfaction of all human needs.