

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE



CAPITALISM: THE ILLUSIONS COLLAPSE

Our Violent Times

War in Syria

Class War

Madness and the Value-Form

Critique of the Traditional Communist Left

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Contents

In this issue	1
Our Violent Times <i>Introduction</i>	3
A New Example of the Destructiveness of Capitalism	5
Capitalism Kills	8
Class War	12
DSM-5: Recipes for Madness	19
Internationalist Perspective and the Tradition of the Communist Left <i>Introduction</i> ...	28
Part 2	29
Part 3	45

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

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In This Issue



Refugee camp in Jordan – Capitalism creates misery

As we were finishing this issue of *Internationalist Perspective*, a ferocious typhoon struck the Philippines, killing thousands and causing immense material destruction. It was yet another confirmation that capitalism's indifference to the impact it has on the ecosystem poses a growing threat to mankind. From a human point of view, the typhoon is an unfathomable disaster. But for the value-system, which is created by humans yet confronts humans as an overwhelming outside force, such destruction is rather beneficial. From the point of view of value, which must grow to survive, yet is drowned in overcapacity, destruction of excess capital is a tonic.

As we write, war is destroying Syria. There is a logic to this conflict and the way it has unfolded, and this logic will repeat itself, the more the deepening of capitalism's crisis shrinks the loot for the robbers to divide. And,

again, the mass killings of civilians in this 'civil' war is a human calamity of enormous proportions, but for capital it's just excess population conveniently being eliminated.

We live in violent times. The systemic crisis of capitalism leads to war, terror, famine, ecological catastrophes. It also pushes capital to wage a war against the working class with harsh austerity measures, attacks on wages and brutal repression of resistance to them.

Both types of conflicts (those between capitals and those between capital and the collective worker) are examined in this issue. Several articles look at the war in Syria and other turmoil in the Middle East. Another article examines the different ways in which capital attacks the collective worker, to cut its costs and squeeze out more surplus value, and the forms of resistance that have emerged in the last years.

The violence of capitalism also takes on more hidden forms such as the treatment of the most vulnerable amongst us: Those that are or are seen as mentally ill. In this issue, an article on mental illness shows that the seemingly 'objective' description of mental diseases is shaped by the evolution of exploitation, alienation and suppression of possibilities of human relationships which characterize capitalism.

The issue concludes with two articles in which we explain our differences with the historical tradition of the Communist Left. In IP 57 we

showed how both its strengths and its weakness were rooted in traditional Marxism. In this issue, we examine the consequences of this limit: the Communist Left's failure to understand the trajectory of capitalism and the revolutionary process in our times. The analysis we offer in contrast, is far from complete, but we hope it contributes to a better understanding of the immense challenges of the present situation.

Internationalist Perspective

November 2013

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Internationalist Perspective on-line

- Don't forget, in addition to the print edition of *Internationalist Perspective*, we also publish an on-line edition. The IP web site is available in English and French, and contains all the articles from the print edition, as well as articles and discussions which do not appear in the regular edition of *IP*. We also publish a blog.
- To visit our web site, go to <http://internationalist-perspective.org>
- To visit our blog go to <http://internationalist-perspective.org/blog>

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

Our Violent Times



Although there are long-term processes in the evolution of inter-imperialist rivalries, there are also moments when their policies quite suddenly re-orientate and are re-shaped into new configurations. Thus were the acrobatics – some clumsy and some finessed – over the past few months in the Middle East, and specifically over Syria.

The recent sequence of events followed the publicity given to the chemical weapon attack in a Damascus suburb in late August. Two-and-a-half years of mayhem touched the imperialist conscience not a whit until some unfortunates were seen to be murdered in an unacceptable way: by gas. This, we are supposed to believe, is far worse than beheadings, torture, napalm and all the other – acceptable – ways of murdering populations.

Following their departure from Iraq and their ongoing withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US

and the UK found their new WMD focus in Syria and prepared to launch air strikes against the Assad regime. Cameron, the UK premier, prepared himself for the role of the US military's chief camp-follower (as had Blair and Brown before) and went to his Parliament to get a mandate; underestimating the Labour Party's duplicity and the scale of his own party's hatred of his European policies, he failed. Hollande did not make the same mistake; ignoring the Assemblée Nationale, he promised French support for the US strike, taking up the mantle of America's new best friend. Obama also said he would get a mandate from Congress but it quickly became apparent that he was unlikely to get it. For the US and UK ruling class there was no unanimity about how to act without getting sucked into another ground war. Their political embarrassment was ameliorated in a most unlikely fashion – by Putin in his guise as Vlad the Peacemaker. His proposal – rejected by

the US at the G20 summit in St Petersburg – to have Assad put his chemical weapons (which he denied having in the first place) under international control. At the time of writing it is claimed that this process is well on its way.

Where does this take us on the road to peace? Nowhere.

Offstage, there is plenty going on. The reorientations do not indicate attenuation of rivalries. A few examples must suffice.

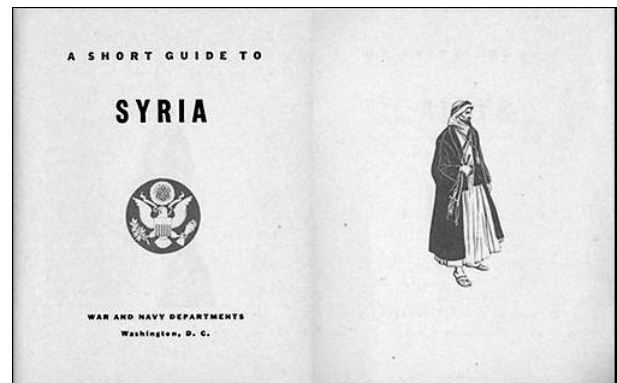
Russia has supported the US fight against the Islamists in Afghanistan, as a contribution to quieting the Chechen and other threats. But Putin does want to rein in the US elsewhere insofar as he can, given Russia's far weaker capabilities; in this he is making the running for both Russia and China. So, as the US reduces military support to Egypt in response for the ousting of the Morsi regime Russia offers the biggest military deal to Egypt in decades.

The US wants some kind of deal with Iran on their nuclear programme in the post-Ahmadinejad era. Though only a tentative telephone conversation took place with Obama, Rouhani has already had a rough reception from the hardliners in Tehran.

At the same time, any softening of the Iranian position threatens the Iranian relationship with the Assad regime and with Hezbollah. On the US side, any softening has repercussions with Israel and Saudi Arabia – between whom there is ongoing tension and who want to see the hardest line taken with Iran. Indeed, the Saudi ruling class has been exasperated by Obama's reluctance to deal more firmly with Iran and there are signs of a widening rift with the US. Indeed Riyadh have recently commissioned new IRBM launch sites aimed at Israel and Iran; and it appears that they have bought a stockpile of nuclear warheads from Pakistan where they will be stored for delivery on request.

One could go on describing the weave of rivalries, alliances, tensions and contradictions that characterise the imperialist relationships today, although the situation is too complex to allow us to forecast how the situation will play

out. This is an ongoing task and we will endeavour to follow the situation on our website.



In Syria itself we can be sure that the misery of millions is a price the imperialist and local forces are willing to pay to conduct their power games. As IP has often argued, the only force capable of stopping this carnage is the self-conscious action of the collective worker – and its prospects are an ongoing discussion. We want to open out this discussion by presenting the following two texts that deal with the interaction between the violence of capitalism and social eruptions such as the Arab Spring.

While both articles share IP's framework, there are some differences; in the main these relate to the ability of such social movements to interrupt the logic of capitalism's repressive drives. So, for Rose, it is their recuperation that furthers the perspective of the dominant class; for Sander, such movements in themselves cannot stop the violent dynamic of capitalism and even provides opportunities for it – as in Libya and Syria. And for Rose, the lack of proletarian autonomy in the Arab Spring comes from non-proletarians while Sander argues that the reforming demands also come from inside the proletariat too, not only from bourgeois propaganda but also from the praxis of life in capitalism.

We invite readers to participate in this discussion through our website.

A New Example of the Destructiveness of Capitalism



Daily Life in Egypt

This summer and autumn 2013 saw the Maghreb and the Middle-East emerge front and center: chaos in Egypt and the removal of Mohammed Morsi; violence and turmoil in Tunisia, diplomatic agitation and the threat of air and missile strikes in the midst of the civil war in Syria.

How are we to understand these events? Are they all linked, and what meaning does IP see in them? This article is a contribution to an understanding of what has occurred, though it's neither the last word on what is still unfolding or the analysis that represents the agreed upon position of IP. The position that is articulated here is that the issues at stake in these events are linked to a more general question: the perspectives arising from the clash between the two fundamental social classes in capitalist society. In effect, the struggle of the proletariat is opposed to the growing social and economic misery, and seeks to create a radically different mode of social existence. The actions of the ruling class only increase the chaos and level of violence, which

is further increased by the global economic crisis. So, whether in Tunisia, in Egypt, or in Syria, the movements of the « Arab Spring, » though in a confused fashion, expressed an aspiration for less exploitation, and better living conditions, and their recuperation has given way to the unleashing of the only perspective left to the ruling class in the midst of a world economic crisis: more austerity, more violence and more war.

On the economic level, the worsening of the crisis has led to a reorganization of priorities in the Middle East around oil resources, intensifying inter-imperialist oppositions on a global level, as well as confrontations between religious factions (Sunni/Shiite), and between religious and secular factions, on a regional level. To defend its various interests, the ruling class will have constant recourse to cynicism, violence, and barbarism of every sort.

Let's go back to an important turning point: the movements designated as the "Arab Spring" were a part of a dynamic that challenged the miserable and oppressive

conditions of life in that part of the world. Those movements quickly spread throughout the Maghreb, the Middle-East, and beyond in Asia. They were animated by a melange of proletarian and bourgeois elements, at the same time making proletarian demands and demands for bourgeois political and economic reforms. We know the outcome of these movements: for the most part they were canalized into the electoral process, which brought Islamist factions to power. That was the case in Tunisia and Egypt. Libya had a similar outcome with respect to its ruler, but was much more confused with respect to establishing a new political regime – a process involving military strikes by European powers and by the U.S. Now it is the turn of Syria, where the same stakes are at issue, and to which we will return below.

Tunisia/Egypt

The very start of these movements posed the question of class perspective : on the one hand, these countries saw workers struggling against exploitation and for an improvement in their deplorable living and working conditions (these countries had seen and are still seeing strike movements), on the other hand, factions of the ruling class aspiring to power and to political reform, affirmed a nationalist perspective that rejected alliances with the economically dominant countries (the U.S. and Europe) in favor of local capitalist interests. To direct these social upheavals onto “democratic” reforms and elections was a way for the ruling class to canalize and to break the will of the proletariat, which was indicative of the weakness of the local proletariat, sunk in a heterogeneity of movements and demands. Today, we see these struggles continuing in these countries; protest movements and strikes continue to break out, both against the growing misery, but also against the bourgeois factions – including Islamists – which have come to power. These movements demonstrate both the will to fight of the world proletariat, as well as its actual difficulties in affirming itself as a class. The dynamic begun by the “indignados,” by Occupy, and the Arab Spring, spread like wild fire, but the links between these different movements did not produce a dynamic based on conscious and organized connections.

The Islamist factions that came to power were clearly factions of the bourgeoisie; factions representing the national identity as opposed to that of the old colonizers, presenting themselves as less corrupt than the old rulers. Nor can we ignore the “social” role often played by Islamist groups in having provided social services where those of the local state had been lacking. The Islamists, then, had a certain social base and popularity within the population.

However, once in power, the Islamists necessarily revealed themselves to be no less tyrannical than their predecessors, and popular movements arose against the absence of any improvement in the economic situation, and against Islamist oppression imposed on civil society. For despite the confused character of the demands of the movements of the “Arab Spring,” they did contain a deep-seated aspiration for more freedom and less exploitation, and those aspirations remained alive.

Again, to try to contain the renewal of social upheavals, the ruling class tried to present its alternative: negotiations by the Islamist government in Tunisia, blocking the rise to power of Islamism effected by the military in Egypt. We have seen how easily the ruling class can change its outward forms: It let out of prison the same Mubarak it had put there, and jailed its disgraced champion, Morsi, demonstrating at each turn that its goal remains to preserve capitalist society and its state intact, whatever the reforms granted or the political faction that it supported. As the British prime minister, Henry John Temple (1850-1860) said: “England has no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests.” It is the same for the U.S., which very pragmatically has supported all the factions of the ruling class in Egypt that have put themselves forward as alternatives: Mubarak, the Muslim Brothers, the new social movements in Tahrir Square, and the military. Each has been fine, so long as American interests are protected. For example, Egypt is an important economic partner, especially in the arms trade. Here too, we can paraphrase that British prime minister: America has no friends or enemies, it just has political, economic, and strategic interests to defend, on which it puts a heavy price.

Syria

In the wake of the “Arab Spring,” a social movement threatened Syria and the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Beginning in 2011, protest movements broke out against poverty, unemployment, and austerity measures. Coordination Committees arose in several cities. Even today, demonstrations continue both to denounce the Assad regime, as well as the Islamists. But those struggles have been obscured by other struggles: under the impact of the global economic crisis, competition over the control and flow of oil has exacerbated regional and inter-imperialist antagonisms in countries that are strategically located. In this region, China and Russia oppose the US; regionally, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Gulf Emirates oppose Islamist factions supported by Iran, Turkey, and Qatar.

The threat of American missile and air strikes were front and center at the end of August and the beginning of September. Its goal was the reaffirmation of the global supremacy of the US, and surely not any defense of the local population – this latter being only an ideological pretext to justify going war. But aside from the need to pound on the table to show who is boss, Obama does face several obstacles: on the one hand, the opposition of a majority of his own population, which does not want to see its soldiers die in far off lands; Iraq and Afghanistan were enough. On the other hand, the American ruling class is probably divided over which strategy to pursue. Overturning the Assad regime might risk destabilizing the whole Middle-East.

Meanwhile Russia, allied to Iran and Syria, has viewed this conflict as an opportunity to enhance its position on the imperialist chess board. The European countries, confront the opposition of their own populations with respect to military engagement. The Iraq war has had its effects there too. A supplementary factor is that Russia, India, and China all face the growth of Islamist factions that are provoking agitation: Tatarstan and the Caucasus for Russia, Kashmir for India, and Xinjiang for China.

The ruling class has also drawn the lessons from its intervention in Libya. The removal of

Muammar Gaddafi gave way to a confused political situation, and it's by no means certain that Western and American commercial interests are better served than under the reign of Gaddafi. To risk such an adventure in Syria is certainly not the objective of the world powers. Those we call the “rebels” are a mosaic composed of deserters from Assad's army, fighters coming from other countries (perhaps 10% of them) moderate Islamists, and radical Islamists linked to al-Qaeda – not a combination that could represent an alternative to the Assad regime.

At the present time, The UN has agreed on the destruction of the Assad regime's chemical weapons. It is still too soon to see all the full meaning and implications of that decision. The Assad regime stands to lose a part of its military power, but to what extent? Is it a measure to win some time (it will take several months to destroy the chemical weapons)? Is it way to weaken Assad without removing him, or the beginning of the end of his reign? Can it be understood as an American victory or a sign of the inability of the US to undertake another military campaign? Time is needed to give an answer.

Conclusion

The chaos and violence that have agitated Tunisia, Egypt, and have been ripping apart Syria for the past two years, are further illustrations of the conflict between the two great social classes.

The perspective of the proletariat is on the side of life: the hope for a community without exploitation, without social and human misery; the perspective of the bourgeoisie is on the side of destruction: to maintain its domination, it is ready for any war, the deaths that results being seen as the necessary “collateral damage.”

So, the present situation is, once again, the reflection of the fundamental antagonism between the two social classes that shape capitalist economic, political, and social relations. Putting an end to war, famine, every kind of exploitation, will not occur simply as a result of violence, but rather through a radical change of society. And that change, at its roots, in its social bases, can only be brought about by the social class whose perspective is life.

Rose

October 2013



The context of human life in our times is shaped by the systemic crisis of the capitalist mode of production. This makes it inevitable that violence and destruction will increase. The downward spiralling movement of the crisis has slowed somewhat, mainly as a result of the intensification of the exploitation of labor power and the massive creation of new money to prop up the profit-rates of banks and other capitals “too big to fail.” Both have their inherent limits so the crisis will accelerate again. It is already doing that in the so-called emerging countries, which withstood the first shock of the crisis relatively well. Everywhere, the gap between poor and rich is growing. The very tactics used to combat the crisis are widening this chasm. Capital trickles up.

The chasm will continue to widen and it would do so even if there was no crisis, because automation made possible by IT offers capitals increasing opportunities to lower labor costs. This action results in a growing mass of proletarians that cannot be integrated in the global production chain and is increasingly seen by capital as an unsupportable burden. In many countries already, youth unemployment exceeds 50%. The very fact that capital reacts

to its crisis by accelerating its tendency to reduce its dependence on living labor, assures that this crisis will worsen. By reducing living labor, the capitalist reduces also the creation of surplus value, and thus of global profit, even if his own profit goes up as a result of his competitive advantage. Worsening crisis will increase capital’s refusal to pay for the reproduction of the ever growing part of the proletariat for which it has no use. A struggle for survival ensues. It is violent, ranging from self-immolation, burning and rioting, fighting the police, dying at sea or in deserts while trying to escape from despair, to blockading roads and occupying squares and factories... Struggles often begin in a non-violent way but are met with ferocious violence from the ruling class, ranging from tear gas to torture and tanks. The struggle for survival is inevitably violent. As the class antagonism sharpens under pressure of the crisis, it will likely become even more so.

But the main cause of increasing violence is not conflict between social classes, but conflict within the capitalist class. The crisis widens not only the chasm between rich and poor, and between workers and capitalists, but also

within the capitalist class itself. Many stronger capitals for the moment still thrive, not only because of monetary and fiscal policies that prop up their “values”, but also because they profit from the misery of others. We see an acceleration of the concentration of capital, weaker capitals being swept aside, gobbled up by the stronger ones at fire sale prices. Almost everywhere, many small enterprises are in trouble, hanging in by their teeth. The pressure is even greater on the social layers between the two classes (shopkeepers, independent producers) who are massively being ruined. Anger and resentment grow, and are directed at the existing power structure or at a scapegoat (such as immigrants) or both. All ancient and not so ancient differences (national, ethnic, religious...) are used by different capitalist entities, that is, managers or would-be managers of the capitalist state, to mobilize cannon fodder for their power dreams. The global pie is shrinking, not in absolute terms but relative to the claims that capitalists have on this wealth. The bigger players even increase their share of the pie. So the pressure of the crisis fosters violent struggle over the remainder of the pie, as well as wild dreams of radically changing the way in which the pie is divided.

This violent tendency does not only come from those sections of capital that feel excluded from power. The pressure of the crisis also fosters power conflicts between the dominant capitals. In this regard, it is important to look at the implications of the convergence of the crisis of the capitalist economy and the ecological crisis. Capitalism always has looked at the natural environment as something outside ourselves, raw material for the creation of more value. Despite the massive indications that this will end in disaster, the crisis pushes capitalism to accelerate the plundering of the planet even more; to continue to destroy rain forests and poison the oceans, despite the catastrophes caused by the destabilization of the climate; to use even more poisonous and dangerous methods to extract minerals and energy resources, tendentially threatened by depletion. The finality of the fossil fuel reserves on which capitalism is so dependent, is a major concern. It drives the rush to expand fossil fuel exploration in disregard to the environmental damage and it intensifies the power struggles in the Middle East, the region where the largest reserves of fossil fuels are situated.

Hence the NATO-war in Libya. Hence the war over Syria.

If both the economic and ecologic crises continue to worsen –and we see no reason to believe that they won’t- we can expect such conflicts to intensify. That doesn’t mean that they would lead to a global war. The dominant powers have many reasons to avoid such a course, not in the least that they lack the deep control over the collective worker that would be needed.

However, the fact that global war is unlikely, does not mean that wars, and other forms of violence, will not multiply and become more destructive. Ultimately, only one social force can stop this dynamic: the collective worker. But, in order to stop it, its struggle must be massive and contagious. And even then, it may only cause a short pause –or readjustment- of the capitalist power struggles. In order to stop it, its struggle must not only be massive and contagious but also autonomous, or at least, autonomizing. By this we mean not only that the mass movement must increasingly refuse to be mobilized behind the goals of this or that party vying for power, but also that the content of the struggle, its explicit or implicit goals, expresses an autonomization from the perspective of capital in a positive way, through a praxis of struggle for proletarian needs (and by extension human needs) against the needs of capital (to be competitive, profitable), against the ‘normalcy’ of the value-form. The radicalization and generalization of such autonomous mass movements is what the communist revolution would be. But even before a revolutionary situation would arise, an autonomizing mass movement would be a serious obstacle on the war path of the capitalist class. By not basing itself on what divides the collective worker (nation, religion, race...) but on the common needs, this movement would tend to be inspiring and contagious because proletarians everywhere could relate to it. That would at the very least shift the focus of the capitalist class away from its wars to trying to recuperate and repress the movement.

Short of such a massive, contagious and autonomizing movement, nothing can stop capitalism from inflicting ever more violence on society. Not even a movement as massive as the Arab Spring. Indeed, the destabilization

which this movement caused opened many opportunities for capitalist power struggles. One of these was the war in Libya (essentially a NATO-operation against an unreliable manager of a big oil-field). The war in Syria too, started during the Arab Spring movement.

It did not start because class struggle had waned in Syria. In March 2011, widespread protests erupted in its major cities, encouraged by the mass movements in other Arab countries. It was fuelled by deep anger over high unemployment, especially of young people, and the crushing austerity-measures of the government. This anger merged with the anger of the factions of the capitalist class excluded from political power and suffering under the crisis. This merger was seamless, because the factions that saw in the popular resistance a tool to gain power, did not have to import their ideologies and goals into the movement: they were already there, in the minds of workers. Still, the very dynamic of the struggle could have led to an autonomization, a praxis contradicting these ideologies.

But that's not what happened. The protests were met immediately with ferocious repression on the part of the government. That they still continued for some time, in defiance of the deadly risks, testifies to the depth of the anger. But soon a military resistance emerged, led by deserters from the army. Everything that happened since March 2011 seems an unbroken continuum. Popular resistance provoked a military repression which provoked a military resistance which provoked the involvement of regional powers and then of the larger players...Every step seems the logical continuation of what preceded. And yet, in regard to the content of the struggle, there is a huge contradiction between the starting point –a struggle for human needs- and what it became: an orgy of destruction, a murderous battle for power in total disregard for human needs.

The results so far: in a country of 22 million people, 4 million are internally displaced, 2 million have fled abroad, most of them barely surviving in horrendous camps, more than 125,000 people are dead, hundreds of thousands wounded, the economy has collapsed, output declined by 40 %, hunger and diseases spread, also because both sides

use blockades to deprive the other of food and medicines. And it's not over.

That outcome is forced upon the population by capitalism. Was another outcome possible? Did the brutal tactics of the Assad-regime leave any other option open than war?

The power of the collective worker is not that it can militarily defeat capitalists. Its power is, to paraphrase Werner Bonefeld, that from the co-dependent relation between capital and the collective worker which capitalism is, the latter can autonomize itself, while capital cannot. Capital cannot cut its dependency from the extraction of surplus value. But the collective worker can refuse to create value, thereby paralyzing capital, to the degree that it succeeds in overcoming the divisions within itself. It is by autonomizing its struggle that the collective worker overcomes these divisions. So it is the autonomization of a proletarian mass movement that capitalism has the most to fear of. It much rather deals with sectarian wars. After all, from the point of view of the needs of the accumulation process, there's nothing alarming about the destruction of Syria, nothing to regret about the mass killings. That's just excess capital being eliminated. And is it not more convenient for capital that different parts of the working class are massacring each other, instead of joining hands in a common struggle?

The working class revolt in Syria failed because it did not autonomize. That made the war possible. The war further sharpened the sectarian divisions. In such conditions the class struggle cannot survive. Still, there are some in the anarchist milieu who think that the "revolution" in Syria is alive and well. They base that claim mainly on the fact that many of the committees and "councils" that were formed during the popular resistance in the spring of 2011, still exist: *"The main form of revolutionary organization in Syria has been at the local level, through the work of local committees and local councils. These were influenced by the work of Syrian anarchist Omar Aziz... They operate as horizontally organized, leaderless groups, made up of all segments of the society. Whilst organizing on the local level, they have built up networks of*

*solidarity and mutual aid across the country.*¹

But, as horizontal as they may be, they mainly seem to be substituting the collapsing state or becoming part of the new state in the part of Syria conquered by the opposition: *“They are often the primary civil administrative structure in areas liberated from the state, as well as some areas that remain under state control.”* This is not class struggle. This is the recuperation of it by the capitalist state. The LCC, a coordination of local councils, moved from opposing all sides in the war to calling for military strikes.

It is true that one local council in Manbej, Aleppo, supported a strike in protest against the ruthless behavior of the Jihadi group ISIS in the town. That is a hopeful sign that the potential for autonomization still exists in Syria and could grow, depending on what happens beyond its borders. There may be many more of such events that we are not aware of. One that caught the attention recently was a large protest demonstration in July, also in Aleppo, against the rebel siege of government-held areas in the city. The rebels stopped supplies from entering western parts of the city to weaken the supply routes of Assad's army, which led to severe food and medicine shortages. Demonstrators were shouting that the rebels were as bad as the government for seizing food from people who had run the gauntlet of snipers as they crossed the demarcation line between the two sides...

It was, so to speak, “a teachable moment” that clearly revealed the stark contrast between the violent perspective of capital and plain human needs, whose only possible defense is an autonomizing proletarian mass movement. The wars within the capitalist class will multiply. In each and every case, there may be rational reasons to choose one side over the other, but plenty of irrational reasons too. But such choices are always for capital. War and revolution are excluding each other. The very first task of pro-revolutionaries is to speak out against any participation in intra-capitalist power-struggles, from elections to wars, and to defend the position that there is no other base

for joining forces but common proletarian interests or basic human needs, which are the same thing. From that base, the perspective of a society without war, misery and exploitation can emerge.

Sander

November 2013

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¹ <http://tahrircn.wordpress.com/2013/09/16/syria-the-struggle-continues-syrias-grass-roots-civil-opposition/>

² In France, 350,000 people fell below the poverty line.

Class War

Labor-power: an excess commodity for capital.

Capital: An obsolete and destructive mode of production for the collective worker.

The Paradox: “Despite unprecedented global wealth, poverty is gaining ground in the West.”
(French newspaper *Liberation*, 10/11/2013)



Garment workers in Bangladesh demand higher wages – November 2013

Never has so much wealth been produced. But 120 million Europeans live in, or are about to plunge into, poverty. Housing evictions continue in Spain. Food distributions are increasing, and queues are lengthening at the “soup kitchens”, including the major cities. The increase in unemployment is inexorable, and has reached unprecedented levels among young people. “*Europe is facing the worst humanitarian crisis in sixty years*”². Social

² In France, 350,000 people fell below the poverty line. And 3.5 million Europeans are dependent on food distribution points of the Red Cross (report from the Red Cross).

regression is blowing in the wind, and the number of workers who cannot pay their bills rise is continuously rising. The future does not look better: “*The problems engendered will be felt for decade, even if the economy improves in the near future.*”

How did we get to this point?

Is it the fault of the “cure” of radical austerity that the IMF advocated with the European commission? Is it the Incentives to deregulate the labor market, advocated by the IMF? Is it that National governments have made “gifts” to businesses, while taxing the workers? The IMF pouts remorsefully, and regrets that

“inequality has intensified in recent decades” and that “the tax system has become less progressive” (C. Lagarde, head of the IMF), but would a possible tax on the wealthy remedy “the worst humanitarian crisis” that Europe has known in 60 years?

What has happened since 2008?

Why does the working class which, by its labor, creates wealth find itself brutally and inexorably dispossessed? Why have the issues of wages, and unemployment, become so prominent? What are the perspectives? Is it simply a “bad time,” that we must pass through in order to return to a better future, to “full employment”?

Despite appearances of “democracy,”³ the social relations under which we live do not allow us to decide, either about the purpose of production nor how to distribute wealth. Capitalism is a world in which work does not exist in its dimension as a “creative human force” but only under the form of labor exchanged for a wage, which alone gives access to the wealth produced by the workers themselves. It is this same labor which is the source of wealth creation, but which, in capitalism takes the form of value, the valorization of capital. Capital needs labor to extract surplus-value to continue to accumulate. Without exploiting human labor, no accumulation of capital is possible.

But another tendency increasingly pushes capital to devalorize, to destroy the old means of production, to increase productivity, and therefore to reduce the amount of living labor contained in commodities. Faced with the crisis, capital must search for new means to increase profits. Profits can only be made at the expense of labor, by reducing labor costs, by companies that are no longer competitive laying off workers, by developing the “informal economy”, that is, the exploitation of labor power without any form of social security. This is why the IMF, while pretending to regret the harsh austerity policies imposed by it continues to urge Paris (for example) “to stabilize its fiscal policy, to reduce its expenses and to give companies more flexibility to

adjust wages and staff”. Wage labor seems to have become an obsolete category, while remaining a necessity for capital.

In the first part of this text, we will see the ways in which the “workforce” has been attacked in recent years. In the second part, we will sum up the reactions of the “collective worker”. In the conclusion, we will return to the question of labor, which seems essential to understand the stakes of the present period.



In the aftermath of a factory collapse in Bangladesh

1. A Massive Destruction of the Working Class

Let's define the “collective worker” as not just “industrial workers” or “those who receive a wage”, but *those who must sell their labor power against a wage* to be able to procure, through that wage, the means for their very reproduction, and the reproduction of their own labor power, or by “those who are devoid of any means for autonomous production”. In this perspective, the “collective worker” includes an ever-greater share of the population. Another consequence is that the collective worker has a series of “faces:” workers in industrial concentrations, office workers, and the unemployed, young people not integrated into the labor market, graduates

³ Articles analyzing “democracy” will appear in the next issue of *IP*

or non-graduates, etc. Never was the collective worker (i.e. those who have only their labor power to sell) so savagely attacked on several fronts. This results in a generalized impoverishment.

Layoffs: We regularly learn that a company closes or relocates, and dismisses all its workers. The testimonies of those dismissed reveal anger and despair, but also indignation, revolt against the fact of being treated as objects, discarded when no longer of use, whereas during the past years on the job, these workers had tried to do their job properly, and even often took reduced wages (the price of their labor power) in order to keep their jobs. The worker's condition appears more and more for what it is: the worker is employed, used while his/her labor power creates profit, once the search for profit leads to the closure of the company, or its relocation, or its reduction in size, the labor force is treated like any other object that you no longer use; it's disposed of. There is no "soul" in capitalist social relations, no taking account of "services rendered", nothing other than a relation where the labor power of the human being is treated as a thing.

Non-integration into the labor market: Previously, the failure to find a way to enter the labor market was the lot of people in the "Third World". Today, it is increasingly what faces young people in European countries. In Spain, 50% of young men and women are unemployed. Parents know that the future (finding jobs, raising a family, having a place to live) will be more difficult for their children than it was for them. According to IMF forecasts, the Spanish unemployment rate will not be less than 25% in the next five years. In Greece, the unemployment rate has reached 27% of the population and 60% among 15-25 year olds. The homeless are more numerous, and lines form waiting for food.

Increased migration and anti-immigration policies: *Lampedusa, October 2013:* Some 400 people die, drowned in the Mediterranean. The boats, carrying immigrants from Eritrea coming to try to sell their labor power sank, and the lives and the dreams of families, youth and children ended at the bottom of the sea. Europe is becoming a

fortress,⁴ protecting its labor market with ever more drastic immigration measures, and the Mediterranean a cemetery for those who dare try to cross it.

But Europe is not only a destination dreamed of by immigrants; it has also become the starting point for new migration flows. Spanish youth for example know that they will leave the community after graduation, hoping that their degree will enable them to sell their labor elsewhere.

The decrease in the price of labor power: In Greece, the politics of drastic austerity imposed by the IMF, the European Commission and European Central Bank have led to a huge fall in the price of labor. Many Greek workers now work for 500 euro per month: *"Today, the average monthly wage of a Greek is 580 euro and 510 euro for a young employee. The average cost of labor for a Greek is 3.7 euro per hour according to data collected by Eurostat in April 2013. (Belgian radio RTBF, September 18, 2013)* 4. More generally, the "European Trade Union Institute, ETUI (European Trade Union Institute), focused on the evolution of wages in Europe since the year 2000. This study shows that in 15 of 27 countries, real wages have declined since the crisis".

In the Americas too: *"Several recent studies show that Mexico is becoming more competitive than China in terms of labor costs. Ten years ago, Mexican wages were 3*

⁴ Since the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), three walls have erected to prevent migration to Europe. The first, built in 1998, and raised from 3 meters to 6 meters in 2005, prevents Moroccans from entering the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The second, a wall the length of 12.5 km, was completed in 2012 between Greece and Turkey. The construction of the third, between Turkey and Bulgaria will soon be underway and should be completed in 2015: 30 km long and 3 meters tall, it will be the longest wall in Europe in 15 years. Bulgaria has been considered by human smugglers as the "cheapest gateway to Europe": 500 Euro on average for the passage from Turkey to Europe (Le Monde, 10 & 11/11/2013). Walls built between Israel and Palestine (2002) and between the United States and Mexico (2006), show that the globalization of capital is accompanied by a desire to control migration flows.

times higher than in China in the manufacturing sector. Now the trend has reversed".⁵

In "developed" countries, there appears a tendency to increase low cost ancillary workers. In Belgium, for example, nearly 300,000 foreign workers, members of the European Union (Polish, Romanian, Portuguese, Slovak, and Hungarian) are currently "permitted" for a specified time. One third of these workers are underpaid, either because they work longer hours than the terms of their contracts permit, or because they are simply underpaid compared to Belgian workers. Even if low cost work is underpaid (1200 euro per month for an "auxiliary post" in 2013), it is sought after, because it's a source of income for some of the young people who otherwise would find themselves unemployed.

Labor power used illegally and underpaid: The informal, parallel economy, is gaining ground. In Brazil, 300,000 Bolivians (or 500,000 according to other sources) were expatriates, working but so far without a work permit or visa. Therefore, *"a large number of Bolivians have no work card signed by the employer, i.e. they work improperly and without social protection."* In the informal economy, having become a cog in the fashion industry in Brazil, the workshops have 5 or 6 employees paid by the piece, without pay by the day. They work for 318 euro per month. Casualization has no limit. According to an estimate, there are 10,000 such workshops. Men and women work 12 to 16 hours a day, six days a week. Under-cover operations have "freed 181 slaves" since 2008!

Physical destruction/elimination of labor: labor power today exceeds the absorptive capacity of capitalism in the form of wage labor, and can no longer be considered a "reserve army". Capital does not know what to do with this excess labor-power or how to keep it docile; it is a part of the working class that neither works nor – lacking a wage – is a consumer. The destruction of the surplus labor force, the physical elimination of some of its parts will not cause the world leaders to shed any tears -- on the contrary.

⁵ <http://fortune.fdesouche.com/310511-le-mexique-sera-bientot-plus-competitif-que-la-chine>

Do we exaggerate? Of course, the crematoria belong to the past. But there are many ways to get rid of the labor power that capital can no longer absorb: wars (see the articles on Syria, in this issue); the increase in food prices, leading to famines, caused, not by natural disasters, but by speculation to increase profits; bank failures (Spain, Greece, Cyprus), which strip workers of their savings, and prevent them from planning their future; increasing repression and imprisonment (in the United States, there are now more black men and women imprisoned or on probation or parole, than blacks enslaved in 1850, before the start of the Civil War ⁶). The so-called "war against drugs", a very profitable industry for some, is actually a "war against the poor". *"In some black inner-city neighborhoods, four in five blacks are likely to fall into the net of the criminal justice system in their lives."* Blacks are so "over-represented" in prison, that they form 35% of the inmates while they represent only 13% of the total population. With Latinos, blacks represent 30% of the population in the United States, but 60% of those in prison. There are other ways in which the surplus labor power can be reduced: the pollution of working class living areas. A recent study ⁷ establishes a link between air pollution and reduced life expectancy in China. As the Financial Times reports, there is a reduced life expectancy in Northern China, where air pollution has assumed epidemic proportions.

The collective worker, who must sell its labor power in exchange for a wage, is being attacked on all sides: layoffs, non-integration into the labor market, loss of housing, loss of

⁶ <http://www.slateafrique.com/1149/etats-unis-plus-de-noirs-en-prison-que-d-esclaves>

⁷ The study uses the Huai River as a way to test the effect of life expectancy on the population. North of the river, the Chinese government has allowed the population free use of coal in 1981, while the inhabitants of South of the river did not have this opportunity. Using data from 1981 to 2000, the authors calculated that the rate of particles in the air was 55% higher in the far North than in the South. Meanwhile, the southerners had cardiovascular disease rates lower than those of the North. Overall, the effect of exposure to micro- particles is estimated to be a reduction in life expectancy of 5.5 years.

replacement allowances, increased repressive laws, expulsion from the European zone, etc.

But, the collective worker is also a class with reflexes of solidarity, with the capacity to organize, with a need to defend itself against the total injustice done to it, and to defend its non-commodified values. We will now turn to this aspect of the present situation.

2) The Many-Sided Response of the Working Class

The multiple faces of the collective worker (factory workers, unemployed youth, auxiliary workers, illegal immigrants...) also mean that demonstrations of opposition to capitalism are varied, without their necessarily having an explicit link with one another. There are different ways of reacting, of developing self-consciousness, of putting in question capitalist commodity relations.

Strikes: Today strikes often occur just to get paid for work already done, or against payment delays.⁸ There are strikes against layoffs, or to negotiate dismissal at the best possible price, where workers openly express their rage at having spent their life working for a company only to be ejected like some commodity that has become obsolete.

Mass demonstrations: The most recent being those in Brazil and Turkey. In Brazil, in March 2013, mass demonstrations were triggered by a spark in a tinder box just ready

to flare up: the increase of a few cents in the price of transport. From Porto Alegre, the protests spread geographically throughout Brazil, and in their content, raised broader claims against government policy, and particular the Pharaonic style expenses related to the FIFA World Cup 2014. These resources, the demonstrators demanded, should instead be spent on health, education, social welfare, where investment has decreased. With up to a million demonstrators, the protests clearly focused on the contradiction between “human needs” and the “needs of capital.”

Mass demonstration of students in Chile (May and September): Against the “too expensive” and poor system of education, hundreds of demonstrations bringing together tens of thousands of students have been held since 2011. They demanded lower costs on the loans taken out by students to finance their studies. In the logic of capitalism, it is the future worker who must pay for his training, even if a degree is no guarantee that the worker will actually be able to sell his/her labor power on the market.

Riots: Sweden, in May 2013. There were four nights of riots that recall the suburban riots in France in 2005, and England in 2011, with torched cars, looted libraries and schools. A destructive energy turned against capitalist symbols was unleashed. The “model of social integration” lay in ashes. At the same time, movements opposed to a reduction of resources devoted to education occurred.

Struggles against housing evictions: Spain: 250,000 evictions since the beginning of the crisis. Banks have become owners of thousands of empty homes; they do not know what to do with them, and leave them abandoned, while continuing to demand from those evicted the payment of all their debt. Neighborhood Committees have organized to occupy empty homes. The evicted families have invested their time and labor in the abandoned houses and apartments. Is that not a powerful metaphor: the bloodsucking of income by the banks, pushing people to appropriate (by force, through organization) the enjoyment of the “goods” from which they have been excluded by an economy based on *value*?

⁸ Bangladesh, October 2013: Thousands of factories across the country were paralyzed by a massive strike by workers demanding to be paid for work performed. “This is a totally new situation,” said a journalist in Dhaka, this is probably due to the recent tragedy of the collapse of a garment factory which caused hundreds of deaths. For their part, the owners of the factories are afraid of losing more customers if they have to pay their workers. “We’ll have to pay, not just for one hour, but for every hour” he lamented, fearing that this would force him to hire an accountant whom he would then have to pay as well... “It’s an endless circle.” There is fear of contagion. First, textiles, then construction. Other changes may follow, such as allowing a day of rest per week (!!) and the prohibition of child labor (!!!)(Source: <http://www.legorafi.fr/2013/09/24/bangladesh-greves-en-serie-des-ouvriers-textiles-qui-exigent-detre-payees-pour-leur-travail/>). The most radical way to make profit = delete wages!

Struggles against the expulsion of persons: France, October 2013: Leonarda, a young Kosovar girl, 15 years old, educated in France, together with her family, were deported. The authorities seized the girl during a trip made on school time. Immediate reactions in the street: thousands of young students protesting against the expulsion of schoolchildren. There is no doubt that the image of Valls, the Socialist Minister, and President Hollande, took quite a hit in the eyes of thousands of high school students: *“This expulsion is the straw that broke the camel’s back” “it is unacceptable that students are expelled. This goes against the Constitution and human rights.” Valls has no right to do that, he is supposed to be on the left and advocate equality*”.⁹



Turkey 2013

3. A Questioning of the Capitalist Social Relation Based on the *Value-Form*?

The movement of the crisis has inexorably deepened, with “levels” of temporary stabilization. However, this trend can only continue and will affect the so-called emerging markets like China, and Brazil, countries relatively unscathed so far. Capital will increasingly refuse to pay to ensure the survival of those who have only their labor power to exchange for a wage. The manifestations we pointed to (suicides, mass demonstrations, lootings, strikes, occupation of public sites and work places) will also increase. We live in the time of chaos.

In a situation of radical attack on its living conditions, the collective workers finds the energy, and discovers new ways to react, to survive, such as the occupation of empty houses, appropriation of goods during looting, etc. Workers, in these moments of struggle, experience that its value that separates them from the goods which they need to assure their reproduction. In these moments of struggle, the collective worker also develops the affirmation of its needs, and its consciousness of the fact that they are antagonistic to those of capital, which vampirizes wealth to feed its hunger for profit (see the example of Brazil).

But this is only one moment of a process. The austerity measures (Greece) generated both rebellion and acceptance. Because having a job (or keeping it), is also essential to survive, even with a minimal wage. Thus neither the mass demonstrations in Brazil nor the movements in Spain affected *production*. There is not (yet) a convergence between movements which paralyze production and the movements of occupation of public spaces or buildings and the demonstrations around them.

But how to get “from here to there?” Will the consciousness that we can abolish capitalism, that other social relations, other ways to produce and to share wealth is possible, arise and develop? The clear articulation of the goal, of social relations not based on value, is a vital element of such a dialectical process.

Indeed, some counter-tendencies against such a process will also inevitably develop: So, in Brittany (France), the management of the slaughterhouse Gad, on the verge of cutting

900 jobs, used Romanian casual workers to work in a nearby slaughterhouse. The anger of the workers of Gad was directed against not just their bosses, but also at the foreign workers hired for lower wages. Marine Le Pen (the National Front) found a fertile ideological breeding ground for her anti-immigrant and racist discourse.

As Lenin said, *"It is only when the 'lower classes' do not want to live in the old way and the 'upper classes' cannot carry on in the old way that the revolution can triumph."*¹⁰

The class war leads each side to measure the extent of its power: repression, tear gas, tanks on the side of capital, strikes, organization, solidarity, mass movements, riots on the side of the collective worker. Even if the bourgeoisie displays an unprecedented arrogance and repression, we must remain attentive to the points where its apparatus is susceptible to cracks and fissures, where, for example the police, or the army, fraternize with demonstrators. The project of a community based on non-commodity relations is universal.

In this war without mercy, the collective worker not only confronts the forces of classical repression, but also the schemes of the left and the leftist factions that promote a "fairer" capitalism: a more equitable redistribution of wealth, an expansion of effective demand through public works, a rise in wages, all of which are in reality impossible within capitalist society today, but which can constitute effective means to ideologically control the collective worker and its discontent

The class war also means that the time of "dreams" within this system is finished. In capitalism, increases in material wealth make the producers poorer. Increases in productivity could liberate us from the dependency on human labor. But rather than reducing the labor-day, labor is intensified and extended, and new forms of slavery arise¹¹, while those not integrated into the labor market are simply and cruelly sacrificed. There is no place for a "leisure society," for a development of free

time, in capitalism. What must be abolished is *abstract labor*, the very mode of existence of the collective worker in capitalist society; the labor that produces surplus-value as the necessary goal of capitalist production.¹²

An

November 2013

En Français

Perspective Internationaliste

<http://internationalist-perspective.org/PI/pi-index.html>

<http://ippi.over-blog.com/>

¹⁰ In Lenin's "Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder", Chapter 9

¹¹ See: <http://dndf.org/?p=12919#more-12919>

¹² See: Bonefeld, W. (2010). Abstract Labour: Against its nature and on its time. *Capital & Class*, 34: 257; <http://cnc.sagepub.com/content/34/2/257>.

DSM-5: Recipes for Madness

This article is a trailer for a longer text which will appear on IP's website – “We’re all in the Madhouse Now! DSM-5 and the real domination of capital.”



In May 2013, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) published the fifth version of its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) with around a thousand pages of definitions of insanities to be used by the psychiatric professions worldwide, by health insurers and by the global pharmaceutical industry. Why is this important? Well, the latest manual is published at a time when humanity has been

experiencing a widespread upsurge (often described as an epidemic) of mental illness; so, in the eyes of the APA, its appearance might be considered timely. But, what should *we* think it represents for the state of humanity?

Madness is not new, nor is it constant; the conditions of its generation and expression vary over time. So, how to define madness? You might as well ask how to define saneness.

You can put words together for dictionary definitions but these are always circular: one is what the other is not. How the mad are socially defined and viewed, the relationships the insane have with the sane in a given social setting, and especially with those who categorise and deal with them: these also vary over time. In other words, insanity has its socio-historical dimensions. How, then, should we link them to the appearance of DSM-5?

To prepare an answer to that question, it is worthwhile to look at how madnesses and the associated therapeutics have developed over the long term as this makes it easier to see where we are today in the evolving processes. Every culture has developed its own approaches to dealing with the insane; and indeed in some historical periods ruling classes have used madness as a component of repression. In this article, we confine ourselves to the main pathways that have led to today's globalisation of defined psychopathological experiences and to the associated psychiatric diagnoses and treatments offered. Many diverse and important aspects of the history of psychiatry have had to be by-passed so as to focus on those most closely related to today's intensification of capital's domination over all aspects of our mental life; one that is nothing less than a major onslaught on our psyches in the interests of expanding the terrain for the valorisation of capital.

Madness of Old

Healing has always been a preoccupation of human societies. A division of labour long ago developed between empirical and physical approaches to damage to bodies and what today might be regarded as psychological healing applied to mental distress. We can see the differentiation on 5th Century BCE Kos where the priests at the temples of Asklepieion dealt with maladies of the soul and where Hippocrates medicalised what he could – into his theory of the humours. We might regard the ways of the shaman as precursors of temple priests, who focussed on the expulsion of adverse influences, and the ways of Hippocrates as precursors of the physicians.

The Christianising of European madness introduced a profoundly different explanation

of its symptoms. Surrounded by supernatural hordes, each human soul was a battleground for the unceasing conflict between the Holy Ghost and the Devil and, while it could be divine, madness was for the most part considered to be of diabolical origin and spread by witches and heretics. Syncretism was pursued in all aspects of social behaviour for the strengthening of Christian domination over non-orthodox beliefs. Thus, for example, the (originally shamanic) expulsion of influences was transformed into the Christian rite of exorcism.

Enlightenment thinkers tended to follow Locke in his view of madness: As the human mind was a tabula rasa, shaped by sense impressions and education, it followed that insanity developed from wrongly associated ideas from which the delusional could be re-educated. This Enlightenment rationalist view was not unchallenged: later, in the Romanticist movement, an oppositional current appeared positively linking art to madness.

By the end of the 18th Century, the secularisation of madness was largely complete. On a theoretical level, spirits were expelled and it was widely argued that the study of insanity should be based on a philosophy of mind. On a practical level, Mesmer (and other 'animal magnetisers') drove into public use techniques of what was later termed *hypnotism* to replace the *exorcism* of the priests.

Where the early Greeks had the Gods throw madness into men's minds, the later Greeks recognised man's own inner self and its conflicts; where the Christians saw the conflict between the diabolical and the divine, the Enlightenment saw erroneously associated ideas. Where shamans extracted disease-objects, the priests exorcised demon possession, and the animal magnetisers hypnotised the afflicted into health. In many cultures, anthropologists have found a respect for those 'touched' by spirits; in mediaeval times, the words and music of Abbess Hildegard of Bingen were revered because God spoke directly to her. At other times, the mad could be the personification of *The Other* as Michel Foucault has pointed out.¹ Such

¹ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, 1965.

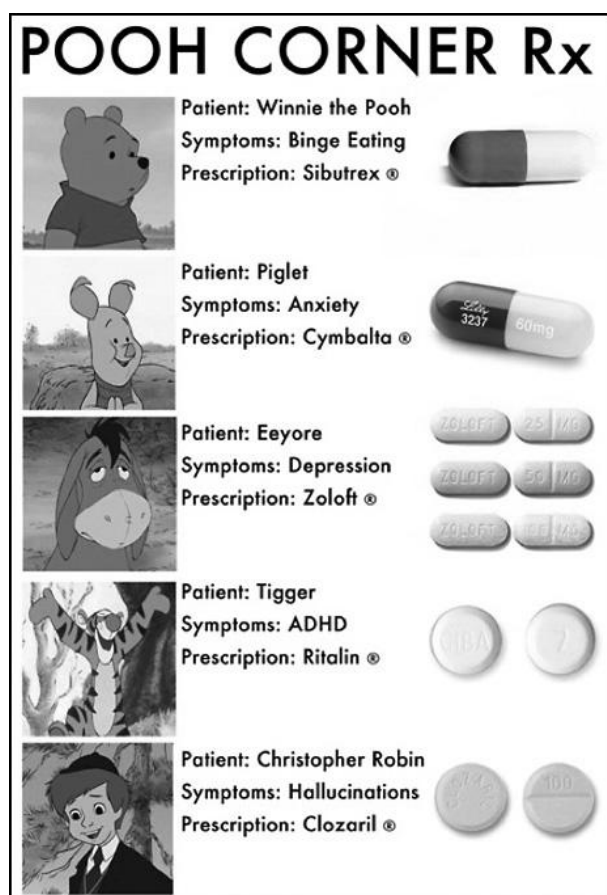
anecdotes exemplify how the expressions, explanations and treatments for insanity all have their historicities, shaped by manifold social dynamics – as do all other processes in human social life. We must remember this when we look at the generation of new categories of insanities in more modern times. A priest now listening to a member of his parish, who wants to obey voices in his head, would likely refer the individual to a psychiatrist rather than exorcise him; even mystics bow to medical science today.

The social transformation from feudal to capitalist socio-economics in Europe was experienced not only at the level of economics or of functionality at the point of production but ramified through all aspects of social and personal life and into mental life and its associated external behaviours. New norms brought new deviances; new social experiences brought new categories of well-being and malady.

Madness in Modern Times

By the 19th Century the relentless strengthening of the industrial revolution was becoming one of main drivers of social change throughout Europe. Along with the accumulation of immense social wealth were developments of new sciences and technologies, new social institutions along with new ideologies, beliefs and rationalisations. The growth of the new classes and the ethos of competition would ensure continuing social turmoil and consequent social and psychological stresses. Within this world were the circumstances that would create the psychiatry that entered the 20th Century: the development of the asylum industry, the development of psychiatry as a profession inside the broad surge to professionalize science, medicine and other technical categories. Inside the profession would come the theoretical constructions that brought conflicting views as to the functioning of the mind and its pathologies.

The asylum industry grew rapidly as it offered financially attractive business opportunities in the fast-growing service sector that accompanied the industrial production of goods. The concentrations of the insane so created fertilised other developments. There was a growth in professional institutions focussed on the management of the insane; from their work came the professional bodies of today (such as the APA and the UK's Royal Psychiatric Association). The insane became a category of study, an interest that fitted into the mushrooming of scientific researches so marked at this time. Within the context of charitable endeavours, systematic treatments and therapies were pioneered and tested by physicians such as Philippe Pinel in France and taken through Europe and the United States. The asylums were also sources of statistics which were becoming a staple for the state bureaucracies which, through the century became progressively more absorbed by measuring the state of their economic and military power; they were interested in strength as well as the weaknesses represented by what they called in French statistical returns, *Les misérables*.



Psychiatry was absorbed into the medical profession where it developed institutionally in

various locations – such as clinics, universities and private practice. The raw material – the insane – was found in asylums, prisons and in open society in the evolving circumstances of life. The industrialising world generated new sources of injuries – not only in factories but outside. For example, terrible and frequent railway accidents were spawning not only physical injury but also bizarre behaviours in the uninjured – ‘railway spine’ being one. It was recognised that these behaviours were akin to those of hysterics which had previously been thought to be the preserve of women.

Transient mental illnesses were also seen, isolated in time and location. For example, in the context of the social anxiety following the events in 1870 France, there was an epidemic of fugue among young men (a kind of dissociation from external reality manifest by physically leaving one’s normal social environment and subsequently displaying post-episode confusion and amnesia); it was almost unknown elsewhere. (Such behaviours were harbingers of what was to follow in 20th Century warfare.)

Psychiatry was brought into the legal system and established itself as the source of expertise regarding an accused’s responsibility for his actions; some high-profile court confrontations over mental responsibility led to the integration of psychiatric theories into law. Its theories also contributed to the developing imperialist national ideologies which were being interwoven with Social Darwinism. Sections of the German ruling class were concerned about the need for racial purity to strengthen its population. After its defeat by Germany in 1870 and the subsequent events in Paris, sections of the French ruling class were preoccupied by theories of degeneracy in its population.

By the end of the century, there were two main organising concepts in psychiatry – one, the psychodynamic view epitomised by Janet and Freud in which the life experience of a sufferer was to be analysed and, second, the view of Emile Kraepelin and others that mental pathologies were the products of biological and genetic malfunctions. Kraepelin devised a nosology (disease classification system) that mimicked botanical classification systems. These two perspectives have since co-existed – sometimes peacefully and pragmatically, and

at other times with considerable hostility. The first half of 20th Century psychiatry was strongly Freudian; but in the second half of the century Kraepelin’s approach was to be strengthened in unexpected ways.

(It’s also worth noting that the asylum industry declined, as the institutions were turned into dumping grounds for the incurably sick, the syphilitic and the elderly, rendering useless what had been effective treatments. The asylums then had reduced attraction to the psychiatric profession as a source of pathological case studies.)

Madness in the Trenches

The national bourgeoisies, the military and state bureaucracies were taken aback by the outbreak of the war neuroses in the early months of the First World War. Indeed, in the British Army, by December 1914 it was estimated that up to 10% of officers and up to 4% of other ranks were casualties of *shell-shock* as the condition was first labelled. After the Battle of the Somme (July 1915) the Army was almost paralysed by the epidemic of psychiatric casualties (40% of the total) whose effects were compounded by the logistical problems generated by sending them home for treatment during the battles. In the following years, doctors, the military high commands of all forces, newspapers and others argued over the medical cause – especially since the symptoms were *rarely* seen in the seriously physically wounded and were seen in soldiers who had never been in battle.

It became clear to the military doctors that, although the term continued to be used, *shell shock* was a misnomer and, as all the original suggestions as to its somatic origins were groundless, the medical view was formed that it was a neurotic condition. The scale of the psychiatric problem continued to alarm the British High Command which was innervated by the approaching Battle of Passchendaele to reduce it. Distilling from experience, instructions were drawn up to implement acute management strategies for handling shell-shocked soldiers. These included acute front line treatment and then returning them to the fighting, with evacuation reserved for only the most severe cases. The statistics showed the effectiveness of the measures: at

Passchendaele in 1917 the overall figure for shell shock fell to 1%.

After the end of the War, an investigation into the whole experience was set up and its conclusions were published in the *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell Shock' (1922)*. The report highlighted the contagious nature of these neuroses, in which there was reckoned to be a strong (iatrogenic) effect from the mode of treatment received, and the introduction of pensions for the psychiatrically disabled. Indeed, all belligerent governments and states were horrified by the size of the pension bills they had created to deal with the urgencies caused by these neuroses, and from this time on financial factors were to become a continuing motif in the history of psychiatry.

Madness in Total War

The 1938 Munich crisis concentrated minds inside the British state which was preparing for renewed conflict with Germany. The Ministry of Pensions took the initiative: it reviewed the work of the 1922 Committee of Enquiry and brought together those with medical experience into conferences held in the summer of 1939. In anticipation of heavy aerial bombardments of cities the issue was broadened to deal with the entire population. Arguments as to the cause of war neuroses were still live; nevertheless, a compromise set of operational principles was drawn up²: not to use quasi-medical words like 'shell-shock' either to the patient or in the media; not to pay pensions for 'war neurosis'; to keep psychotherapy to a minimum and rely on social pressure; and to use personnel selection to keep vulnerable people out of the forces.

The bureaucrats recognised that contagion of the psychopathologies, of war neuroses, was potentially as virulent as an infection of plague. And efficacy of treatment, containment of contagion, required strong management of those showing symptoms. This was a philosophy of 'tough it out' imposed on *society*,

and not only soldiers. It was recognised openly in this wartime ideology that fear and distress were *natural* emotions in such circumstances and that everyone felt the same. The social expectations of that time provide us with a benchmark against which current ideology can be compared; they also provide input into our understanding of *why* it changed.

Capitalism's development during the 19th Century created many new stressors in society – not just at the point of production but throughout social life – and generated psychopathologies that were categorised in new ways by the psychiatrists who studied them. Their perspectives percolated through society. In the first half of the 20th Century capitalism was characterised largely by the orgies of killing in massive industrialised general warfare and the psychopathologies generated worked against military effectiveness. The second half of the 20th Century brought huge changes to the structure of capitalism and its psychological stressors and these were to have a great impact on society, insanity and the pursuits of psychiatry.

Post-1945: New Bible Trails and 'Magic Bullets'

In 1943, the US army issued *Technical Bulletin Medical 203* as a guide for its psychiatrists and this was used after the war by the demobilised psychiatrists when they went back to civilian life.

The "international standard diagnostic classification for all general epidemiological, many health management purposes and clinical use" according to the World Health Organisation (WHO)³ is its *International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* (ICD) whose origins go back to the 1850s. The ICD is the standard in all WHO Member States – including the US. In ICD-6, published in 1949, there was included for the first time a section on mental disorders which the APA noted was similar in nomenclature to *Medical 203*. Nonetheless, the APA decided

² These are Ben Shephard's summary in his paper: The Rise of the Trauma Culture, 'De Historie Vande Psychiatricais Basis Voor De Toekomst', Je Havens & GJ Van Der Ploeg (eds), 2002.

³ See WHO website: <http://www.who.int/classifications/icd/en/> (retrieved 30 April 2012)

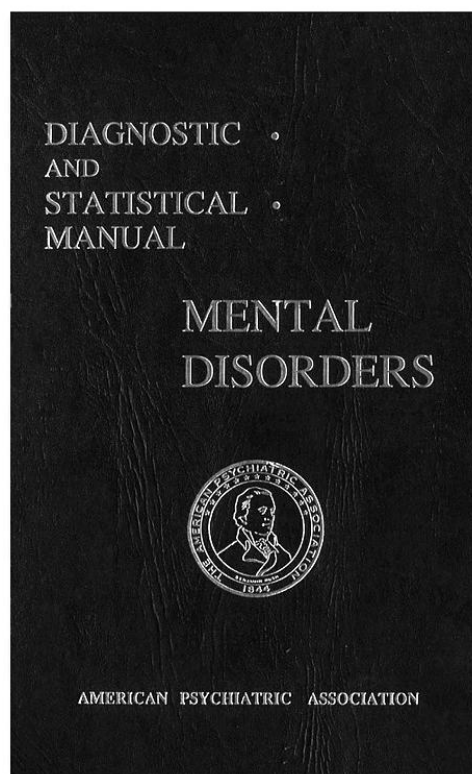
that it should compile its own manual to be used alongside the ICD. Thus began the DSM series, based on *Medical 203*, DSM-I appearing in 1952 and DSM-II in 1968. The philosophy of these first two Manuals continued the tradition of a psychodynamic conceptual organisation of mental illness diagnosis, with strong psychoanalytic content.

In practice neither DSM-I nor DSM-II was much used as the American psychiatrists tended to compile their own mix of diagnoses and psychotherapies (largely Freudian) to deal with their patients. However, there were many changes taking place in the environment: changes in the American health industry after 1945, changes in reimbursement processes, professional changes including a propagation of talk-therapy services with an uneasy relationship to psychiatry whose market was expanding to medicalise all kinds of life problems having little to do with mental illnesses. Furthermore, from the early 1950s the pharmaceutical companies were starting to develop 'magic bullets'.

Chlorpromazine, developed in France, was the first. Investigated in the course of a search for compounds toxic to the microbes that caused fly- and worm-borne illnesses, it was found to 'disconnect' various brain functions. Indeed it was suggested in 1951 by a surgeon experimenting with the drug that it may have a psychiatric use as it 'produced a veritable medicinal lobotomy'. In the following year, its use spread across European asylums as a means of quietening wards and facilitating patient management; it was described as a neuroleptic because it seized hold of the nervous system. It crossed the Atlantic, to be marketed in the US as Thorazine.

To begin with, Thorazine was used to relax patients and make them accessible to treatment; as the *New York Times* put it, they were "adjuncts to psychotherapy, not the cure." Yet by the end of the decade, it was claimed that new psychiatric drugs, such as anti-depressants, "may be compared with the advent of insulin, which counteracts symptoms of diabetes." By 1963 the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) endorsed the rebranding of the neuroleptics as antipsychotics, muscle relaxants became mood normalisers and the psychic energisers, anti-depressants. The introduction of neuroleptics

into the witches' brew of health industry bureaucracies, reimbursement processes, pharmaceutical marketing, and professional rivalries, could only elevate the toxicity.



Sea Changes: DSM-III and the 'Victory for Science'; DSM-IV and Trauma

Robert Spitzer was appointed to lead the task force preparing the new version of DSM for publication in 1980. He was animated by the debacle over the change to the homosexuality designation in DSM-II; the cultural prejudice that had defined homosexuality as a mental disease had been knocked out in the seventh printing in 1974 – not by medical or scientific research – but by political protest. This undermined the claim to scientific validity for DSM. To counter this, Spitzer looked for a more supposedly scientific framework and found it in a group of neo-Kraepelinians with whom he produced a set of specific criteria to be used for psychiatric diagnosis. Out went the Freudian legacy and in came Kraepelin's. (Although, as a sop to the psychoanalysts, the word *neurosis* was put in parenthesis after the word *disorder* throughout the document.) It was a putsch; and what enables a putsch to be successful is a clement context and a favourable alignment of forces. The

descriptive nature of the document harmonised with so many needs: of institutions, of legal processes, of the pharmaceutical industries and the blurb (oral and written) used to 'scientise' the ideologies and products of self-serving snake oil merchants.

DSM-III was heralded as a 'victory for science'. Yet DSM-III was no more immune from political pressures than its predecessor had been; I cite only one example here. Against the resistance of many on the task force who argued against its adoption, DSM-III included the new diagnostic category – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). "... [T]he events ... allow us to see elements of the routine politics of diagnosis and disease in an especially clear light. PTSD [was] in DSM-III because a core of psychiatrists and veterans worked consciously and deliberately for years to put it there. They ultimately succeeded because they were better organized, more politically active, and enjoyed more lucky breaks than their opposition."⁴ The inclusion of PTSD opened a channel for widening the concept of trauma.

Under the DSM-IV task force whose manual was published in 1994, trauma was plasticised. To paraphrase one social anthropologist⁵, not only do encounters with death and injury affect people in different ways but also what constitutes a threat can be conceived in widely different ways in different people; furthermore, the stressor can not only be experiential but an account of the experience may be sufficient; and to round off the diagnosis the inability to remember the event – even 20 years later – is symptomatic of PTSD. And with widespread use, and progressive vulgarisation, PTSD can now appear anywhere. For example, a postal questionnaire sent to doctors attending victims of the 1998 bombing in Omagh, Northern Ireland, found that 25% of them had PTSD; the paper reporting this 'finding' even berated the doctors for not seeking treatment.⁶ Furthermore, "by

widening the definition of traumatic stressors to include the experience of learning the news that something bad has happened to someone to whom one is close: second hand shocks now count."⁷ In the UK, awards for psychological damages based on the diagnosis can be several times higher than, say, the £30,000 - £40,000 limit that the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority applies for the traumatic loss of a leg."⁸

Where psychopathologies were once regarded as problems by the ruling class, obstacles in the way of achieving their objectives, towards the end of the 20th Century insanities had become market opportunities, as we shall see...

Madness for the 21st Century: DSM-5

In contradiction to the ideology about the openness of the scientific process, the task force for DSM-5 has tried to cover its tracks by having members sign non-disclosure agreements, so we don't know about all the political wrangling for this new round of scientific endeavour. I'll give two examples of problems that confronted the task force.

First, in a keynote paper, *The Conceptual Development of DSM-V* written in 2009, they admitted a failure to provide a basic definition of a mental disorder, an inability to find separations between mental disorders, and confessed they were unlikely to find single gene underpinnings for most mental disorders – a crude and reductionist view in any case. Secondly, the field trials showed appallingly low levels of diagnostic reliability, so they instead set for themselves the goal of 'managing expectations' to condition their profession and other users to accept poor results. And we are supposed to believe that this is *science*?

⁴ See Wilbur J Scott, PTSD in DSM-III: A Case in the Politics of Diagnosis and Disease, *Social Problems*, v37, no 3, August 1990.

⁵ Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, 1995.

⁶ Jenny Firth-Cozens, Simon Midgley, Clive Burges, Questionnaire survey of post-traumatic stress disorder

in doctors involved in the Omagh bombing, *British Medical Journal* v 319 no 7225 (Dec 18-25, 1999); p 1609

⁷ Derek Summerfield, The Invention of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Social Usefulness of a Psychiatric Category, *British Medical Journal*, v 322 no 7278 (Jan 13, 2001) pp 95-98.

⁸ Ibid

Since the publication of DSM-5 in May 2013, old existential arguments about the future direction for psychiatry have been rekindled. Two recent documents are noteworthy. In one, a paper written by Kenneth Kendler, the role of the DSM-5 Scientific Review Committee is described⁹ as a huge effort made to 'scientise' what was in essence a negotiation process, and is well worth reading to grasp how these people work. He draws lessons for the production of future versions of DSM and looks forward to many more of them. By way of contrast Tom Insel, the Director of the NIMH, blogged¹⁰ his assessment of the new Manual and emphasised "its lack of validity." He declared the NIMH's intention to re-orientate its research away from DSM categories and, as the NIMH is the world's largest funder of research, this is no mean threat to the psychiatrists. After rubbishising some of the DSM methodology, he went on to say that it should continue to be used until something better comes along. The 'something better' will come as a result of "collecting the genetic, imaging, physiologic, and cognitive data to see how all the data – not just the symptoms – cluster and how these clusters relate to treatment response." This is because, in the NIMH view, "mental disorders are biological disorders involving brain circuits that implicate specific domains of cognition, emotion or behaviour." Seems like the DSM categories weren't such a victory for science after all. But, hey, the science is dead; long live the science.

Our Psyche and the Value-Form

The size of the current epidemic of mental illness diagnosis is grotesque. The absolute numbers of diagnosed sufferers in the US are breathtaking: for example, major depression affects 15 million adults, anxiety and manic depression 40 million adults of whom 14 million are designated severely impaired in their ability to function in society. Furthermore, the life expectancy of the

seriously mentally ill has in recent decades has shrunk by between 15 and 25 years. And the epidemic isn't confined to adults; children have become a major target group. At the end of the '80s, 1 in 250 children were taking an anti-depressant; by 2002 it was 1 in 40, a greater than six-fold increase.

With all the billions of dollars of pharmaceuticals pumped into the American patient population, what have been the long-term outcomes for the afflicted? The statistics can be found elsewhere¹¹, but the general picture is given in the following headlines. With schizophrenia, the outcomes for un-medicated sufferers have remained roughly steady: about 70% of people suffering a first episode of psychosis were discharged from hospital within eighteen months with few returning over lengthy follow-up periods; today only 5% of medicated patients recover over the long term. Anxiety used to be considered to be a mild disorder; today it is the primary diagnosis for 8% of people on the benefit rolls because of psychiatric disability. In 1955 major depression had hospitalised 38,000 people with high expectations for remission; today it is the main cause of disability in the US for people between 15 – 45 years old. Bipolar disorder – previously known as manic-depression – was once rare with an 85% recovery rate; now recovery is down to approximately 33% and, over the long term, those who reliably continue on their medications can become almost as impaired as schizophrenics on neuroleptics. Such is the triumph of medical science and its magic bullets.

This description of today's mental illness bears little similarity to an overview that might be made of 1950, or the years of world war, or at the end – or beginning – of the 19th Century, as the examples mentioned in this article illustrate. As I indicated earlier, mental illness has its historicity and that didn't stop when psychiatry was invented. Medical pathologies have flowed along courses created by capitalism's trajectory. These courses have created stressors that acted on society and

⁹ K S Kendler, A history of the DSM-5 scientific review committee, *Psychological Medicine*, August 2013, pp 1-8.

¹⁰ Thomas Insel, April 29, 2013, *Director's Blog: Transforming Diagnosis*.
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/about/director/2013/transforming-diagnosis.shtml>

¹¹ See references in Robert Whitaker, *Anatomy of an Epidemic: magic bullets, psychiatric drugs and the astonishing rise of mental illness in America*, 2010. Part three – Outcomes.

generated the pathological effects apparent at different moments – be the fugues of late 19th Century France, the neuroses of 20th Century warfare, or the glut of depressions in 21st Century civilised life. Here is where the base/superstructural model of orthodox Marxism shows itself to be entirely inadequate to the task of explaining the historicity of psychopathologies. The centrality of the value-form to an understanding of capitalism does not translate to seeing it in purely economic terms. The value-form is the key social symbolic for capitalism – but it does not stand alone. It has to be considered in the context of all the social factors – such as authority, norms, beliefs, identities – that enable society to operate. Together, they enable the value-form to penetrate into the very subjectivisation of the human being in capitalist society. This is a dynamic process and it is imperative that its historical dimension be recognised.

So, at one time the state and its medical bureaucrats developed methods to manipulate and manage soldiers in warfare, and later extended their procedures into the civilian population as I indicated earlier. That such processes were developed to meet military needs when bourgeois states were at war is not surprising. What is astonishing is the way in which the PTSD created for DSM-III purposes has permeated so many areas of life. Now bourgeois society recognises trauma disorders in survivors of everything from tsunamis to child sex abuse, from the Holocaust to road accidents, from ethnic cleansing to just reading about it. We see the trauma culture growing through the definitions made by doctors, medical scientists and ancillary industries. Treatment offers come from a counselling industry equipped with all sorts of therapies and anti-depressants. Effectively, this commodifies victimhood. Are many of these people who go through appalling experiences very distressed? Undoubtedly so. But suffering from mental *disorders*?

Culturally, this promotes an entirely negative focus on mental pathology as a shared experience for humanity in the 21st Century. And rather than the result of a centrally-directed component of war policy, this focus is the outcome of all the interested institutions in capitalist society negotiating their way through the socio-economic pathways enabled by the value-form. The 'boom' of the last few decades has fuelled the *lifestyle* industries with their celebrities, magazines and TV talk shows. They all contribute to the interpretations and reinforcement of mental distress conditions, and maintain and extend the epidemics. These institutions all have their market niches and their profit targets, and their mutual reinforcements contribute massively to structuring receptivity to the spread of distress alongside their role of social diversion. TV programming, especially, dovetails into the globalisation of American culture, to play its role in spreading the fertiliser internationally.

This is but one facet of the reification processes in society. In addition to reification of the worker at the point of production, and of the consumer in the market place, capitalism is also reifying humanity's soul, using the human psyche as yet another terrain for the valorisation of capital, for the deeper penetration of the value-form – intensifying working class atomisation and contributing to further market expansion.

The pressure is on to individualise the responsibility for insanity as something the individual *owns*. The *individual* has the malfunction, and the psycho-industries are going to find a cure for his broken brain. In so doing, attention is diverted from the real source of madness: the utter insanity of this socio-economic system.

Marlowe
October 2013

Internationalist Perspective and the Tradition of the Communist Left



Internationalist Perspective originated in the tradition of the Communist Left and continues to identify with the fight which this pro-revolutionary current has waged. But over the years, we also came to understand its limitations and mistakes. While the historical context in which the Communist Left was born makes these limitations understandable, it is no excuse for the theoretical and political stagnation into which this current fell.

In a series of three texts we developed our critique of the Communist Left and, at the same time, spelled out our own views on the questions they confronted and which still confront us today, ranging from theoretical to practical: how can we understand social reality, history, the periodization of capitalism, crisis, and revolution.

In the first part we looked at the theoretical framework of the Communist Left. While it was the best, the most consistent expression of pro-revolutionary Marxism, it remained imprisoned in the ideological mindset that traditional Marxism had become. The second part examines how this mindset made it impossible for the Communist Left to understand the trajectory of capital. The analysis we develop in contrast, while rejecting traditional Marxist dogmas, returns to Marx, especially to the understanding he developed

in his later years, that it is the value-form itself -- a skewed, fetishized, way of seeing things and people, and not just the "unjust" theft of value -- that is the basis of capitalism, that shapes its trajectory, that causes its crises. And that must be abolished. That abolition is the essence of the revolutionary process, argues the third text in the series. It shows that the Communist Left's understanding of revolution and of revolutionary organization is stuck in the past. It also looks at some of the positions of the "communisation" current, which in some ways are an antidote to the stagnation of the Communist Left but come with their own pitfalls. In contrast to them, IP insists that only a social force can accomplish a social revolution, and that in our times, this social force can only be the collective worker.

At its conference last summer, IP collectively discussed, amended and approved the three texts. IP does not have a platform, but this series is the most comprehensive exposition of our positions since "The world as we see it" in *IP* #27 (1994) (readers who compare the texts will notice our considerable evolution since then). The first part of this text appeared in *IP* #57, parts 2 and 3 are printed below. Part 2 is abridged for the printed page but the complete version will be on our website soon.

IP and the Tradition of the Communist Left Part 2: Understanding the Trajectory of Capital



Majdenek 1944

10. The First World War was a watershed moment in the trajectory of capitalism. Not that war was anything new. Men had fought each other since the dawn of history. With the advent of capitalism, wars had increased in frequency and scope, and thus also in their murderous and destructive impact. They were essentially waged for the expansion of capitalism: against the ancien regime, the old system and all its obstacles to the commodification of labor power and to bourgeois rule; for the transformation of Europe's political landscape, with its heterogeneous empires and myriad of little kingdoms and duchies, into modern capitalist nation-states; for the subjugation and plundering of weaker civilizations; for the

conquest of colonies, but also, once the presence of capital had engendered a local bourgeoisie with distinct interests, for national independence; for the removal of all obstacles to the progress of industrialisation.

The consequences of these wars were horrible, especially for indigenous populations. The proletariat of the developed countries too suffered greatly, and the more so as industrialisation impacted warfare. The bigger the canons, the more canon-fodder is consumed. In the American war against secession in the 1860's, more than 600,000 people perished. It was a harbinger of things to come. Yet horrible as they were, these wars

generally served the purpose of capitalism's expansion. WW1 did not.

In WW1 capital did not violently expand, but devoured itself. For the first time, all developed capitalist countries engaged in a common cannibalistic destruction of capital on a massive, global, scale, and most of all of variable capital, of workers: tens of millions of them. And almost all the mass organizations that had emerged from the working class struggle, the socialist parties and the trade unions, helped them do it. Their role was crucial in leading the proletariat to the killing fields.

There had been signs before of the old workers movement's gradual osmosis with the capitalist state but its role in making possible this proletarian holocaust was the definitive proof. When after years of slaughter, revolutionary struggle broke out, again the parties of the Second International and most unions ¹ sided with capital, against the working class.

For communists, grounded in traditional Marxism, it seemed clear that these social convulsions were signs of an historic shift. An era of wars and revolution had begun, and that could only mean, according to the traditional Marxist stage-theory, that capitalism had completed its "historic mission" of preparing the way for communism. Since Marx had written (in 1859) that "No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society" ², it had to mean that now the point had been reached at which the productive forces could no longer develop in capitalism, and their further development required revolution. It had to mean that the ascendant, "progressive" phase of capitalism had ended, that its decadence had begun.

¹ With a few exceptions, most notably the IWW in North America.

² Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Progress ed.), p. 21.
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>



The War that didn't end all wars

"Decadence"

11. Both the Italian and the German-Dutch branches of the communist left strongly identified with the first congress of the Third International, whose principal theoretical document, the *Manifesto to the Workers of the World*, drafted by Trotsky, was the first text to develop the concept of the *decadence of capitalism* as a historical period distinct from its "ascendance." The onset of this period was invoked to explain the imperialist character of all developed national capitals, the world war and the betrayals of the parties of the Second International and of the trade unions associated with them.

The *Manifesto* spoke of the "general death crisis" of capitalism, of a new "epoch of crisis" that opened with WWI, and of the "epoch of final, decisive struggle" of the world working class. ³ One year later, the Program of the KAPD ⁴ claimed: "the Twilight of the Gods of the bourgeois-capitalist world order is nigh." And: "Capitalism is experiencing its definitive

³ While the term "decadence" does not appear in the *Manifesto* of the first congress of the C.I., it does appear in documents of the C.I.'s second congress of the following year. Thus: "the period of capitalist decadence is the period of the direct struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat." It also appears in the Program of the KAPD. Thus: "In a State which carries all the symptoms of the period of the decadence of capitalism, the participation in parliamentarism is also part of these reformist and opportunist methods."

⁴ The KAPD (Communist Workers Party of Germany) was probably the largest left communist organization, with 80 000 members in the early 1920's.

failure, it has plunged itself into the abyss in a war of imperialist robbery; it has created a chaos whose unbearable prolongation places the proletariat in front of the historic alternative: relapse into barbarism or construction of a socialist world.” Both of these fundamental documents had an apocalyptic tone to them, speaking of a global capitalist system in ruins, incapable of further development, and thus also incapable of conceding any economic benefits to the working class, rendering the reformist means of struggle of the previous period of relatively peaceful growth and development impossible, and so necessitating the taking up of revolutionary means of struggle, and the new organizations for waging that struggle that had been formed in workers’ revolutionary uprisings in Russia and Germany: the soviets or workers’ councils.

In the inter-war years, left communists had to accept that the revolutionary wave had been defeated, that Russia remained a capitalist state. But the deep global depression confirmed their view that capitalism was collapsing. In 1937, the Belgian Fraction of the International Communist Left (ICL), basing itself programmatically on the positions of the Italian Fraction (*Bilan*), in its founding *Declaration of Principles*, claimed that: “The communist fractions can only forge the theoretical weapons that are vital to the success of the revolution if they understand the internal workings of capitalist society in its stage of historic decline and if they link their analysis of events directly to the significance of this epoch.” The significance of this epoch was that “the productive forces as a whole can no longer develop within the framework of the capitalist system because they have attained the maximum that is possible with the nature of this system.”⁵

Unlike the parties of the Third International, whose positions soon were dictated by the needs of the Russian capitalist state, the Left Communists, vilified by Lenin and excluded from the International, drew the logical political conclusions from this analysis: since capitalism had concluded its historic mission and global revolution was on the agenda, all forms of collaboration with the class enemy

had to be rejected. So no support for nationalism under any form, no common fronts with parties loyal to capital, no participation in the power structures of the capitalist state, rejection of the methods and organizational forms (parliamentary parties, trade unions) based on (now illusory) reformism.



The depression of the 1930's followed by an even more devastating world war seemed to confirm the validity of the decadence-theory. Better than before, because now there was an obvious causal link between capitalism's economic crisis and the orgy of destruction that followed. Left Communists theorized that the trajectory of capitalism in decadence must consist of repeated cycles of crisis-war-reconstruction, every time more horrible, until proletarian revolution puts an end to this madness.

But the gigantic post-war growth of capitalism put a big question mark on the decadence theory. By no stretch of the imagination could this vast expansion be portrayed as a mere reconstruction. For a quarter century capitalism enjoyed almost continuous strong growth that also brought a substantial improvement of the material conditions of the working class, which bought a relative social peace. But that peace was shattered in 1968.

The following years, marked by the return of global economic crisis, massive working class struggles, radicalisation, war resistance, and heightening tensions between the two imperialist blocs, gave new life to the

⁵ See the ICC's book *The Italian Communist Left 1926-45*, pp.179-180.

decadence theory. The crisis kept deepening, and the arms race between the blocs was accelerating; confirming the hypothesis that crisis must lead to world war unless world revolution intercedes. A new generation discovered the ideas of the Left Communists, who by then had dwindled to a few tiny groups. New organisations popped up, basing themselves on the Left Communist tradition. The largest of these was the International Communist Current (ICC), which succeeded in regrouping Left Communists in several countries.

12. The concept of decadence was (and is) the lynchpin of the platform of the ICC. It is invoked at every step in order to explain why forms of struggle that the proletariat was able to utilize prior to WWI are henceforth not only no longer possible but positively opposed to the advancement of that struggle. Decadence is also invoked to explain imperialist war, fascism and state capitalism. All of the ICC's basic positions and analyses of contemporary capitalism rest on its productivist understanding of decadence –the impossibility of further development of the productive forces -- and without it those positions and analyses have no foundation.⁶ Even if other tendencies within the contemporary communist left milieu may not be quite so extreme in this dependence on the concept of capitalist decadence, the general trend holds for them as well.⁷

IP originated as a split from the ICC in 1985. The reasons of the split had more to do with the suffocating climate that resulted from the organization's relentless focus on its own

growth, seen as the key to revolutionary success than with disagreements over the platform. In fact, at first IP continued to defend the ICC-platform, calling itself for that reason, an 'External Fraction of the ICC'. It quickly became apparent, however, that what was wrong with the ICC was not just organizational, but *programmatic*; that its capacity to grasp the trajectory of capital was woefully deficient. We had to face the fact that the decadence theory just didn't square with the undeniably strong development of the productive forces in the second half of the 20th century. Furthermore, our theoretical investigation made it clear to us that the ICC's understanding of decadence rests on a faulty theoretical basis. Yet at the same time we were still in agreement with the main political positions which the ICC and other Left Communists derived from this productivist decadence theory. We saw confirmation of them in reality: in the anti-working class nature of national liberation struggles and state capitalism, in the sabotage of workers struggles by the unions, in the phoniness of the democratic circus and so on. We realized that we needed a more solid theoretical understanding of the trajectory of capital and its implications, if we wanted to be more than cheerleaders for radicalization.

We stopped calling our group "External Fraction of the ICC" when, in the course of our evolution, we came to reject core elements of the platform of the ICC, and its theoretical underpinnings: its vision of the accumulation process and its contradictions based on the theory of Rosa Luxemburg on the disappearance of pre-capitalist markets as the cause of capitalism's crisis; its concept of the decadence of capitalism as a halt, or at least a dramatic slackening, of the growth of the productive forces; its concomitant vision that capitalism in its phase of decadence precluded an increase in the standard of living of the working class; its vision of state capitalism based on the model of Stalinist Russia (seen as the mirror in which the whole of the capitalist world could view its own future); its insistence that aside from short periods of reconstruction, decadent capitalism, in the absence of proletarian revolution, was condemned to live through a cycle of crisis/world war/crisis/world war.

⁶ The ICC modified its prior view that decadence involves an absolute halt in the development of the productive forces by the time it adopted its platform (1975), which followed, after all, a period of unprecedented growth of the productive forces. So in the ICC-platform, decadence no longer means a halt in the growth of the productive forces, but rather a slackening in their growth, a permanent slowing down of their development. This is, of course, a view that is just as productivist as the previous one.

⁷ See, for example the Platform of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party (since re-named the Internationalist Communist Tendency) and its text "Refining the Concept of Decadence", both of which can be found on its website: www.leftcom.org.

It's understandable why, during and after the Second World War, Left Communists might see the history of the 20th century in cyclical terms. But looking back from our vantage point in the 21st century it is untenable. More than just an error of economic analysis, the Cyclists' perspective became a straitjacket for the analyses of Left Communists of the capitalist trajectory throughout last century and into this.⁸

A Marxist theory adequate to the demands of the present time must grasp *both* the *progress* of capitalism in the present epoch, its capacity and imperious drive to develop the productive forces as a condition for its own survival as a mode of production, and its *social retrogression*, its devastating consequences for the human species and the very real danger that its continued existence represents for the world. What the ICC denied, the possibility that capitalism could progress even in an epoch of social retrogression (decadence), is the reality in which we live. And if we are to politically confront the capitalist Moloch, it is vital for Marxists to understand the transformations, the reshaping of the social, political, cultural, and class, landscape that it has wrought.

13. In developing this understanding, the concepts which Marx used in "Results of the immediate production process"⁹ of formal and real subsumption of labor, or formal and real

domination of capital¹⁰ were crucial to us. They position the ways in which value expands and the value-form spreads at the heart of the trajectory of capitalism.

Formal domination

Capitalism was born in a world in which all wealth resulted from the combination of natural resources and human labor power and in which the surplus product was appropriated by the ruling classes. It did not change that. But under capitalism the submission of the producer became only economic, arising from the specific content of the sale (value-creating labor) and not from fixed political and social relationships of supremacy and subordination. And the producer was separated from his work instruments and his land and from the products of his labor, so that both his means of production and his means of subsistence confronted him as capital.¹¹

Capitalism, as a mode of production, was born when the value-form went inside the production process, and turned labor power into a commodity. The unique capacity of this commodity to create more value than what it costs is what launches and drives the accumulation of capital. Capitalism developed a great hunger for this commodity, destroying the pre-capitalist social relations, the bonds of producers to their means of production, in order to create a steady supply of exploitable proletarians. The essential goal of the capitalist was to control the labor process to squeeze as much surplus labor from it as he could, by employing as many workers, including even small children, as he could, and extending the duration of the labor day as much as possible. Adding more hours to the labor day does not change its value, which remains determined by the value of the means of subsistence of the worker, but it expands the value created in that day and thereby increases the surplus value, and thus profit. Marx called the surplus value obtained in this way – through the extension of the labor day --

⁸ Given the cycle theory's variance from reality, and thus the need to explain the absence of either world war or world revolution despite the crisis, the ICC tweaked its framework, claiming that the next step of the cycle was blocked, because neither of the two major classes was able to impose its perspective. As long as this stalemate continues, so it reasoned, the capitalist system increasingly decomposes. Hence, in the cycle, an additional stage was added: the era of decomposition. It was an attempt to save the broader mechanical framework but it was not mechanical enough for the ICT, who criticized it for abandoning orthodox cycle-theory (See Revolutionary Perspectives #37, on the ICT website).

⁹ This essential text of Marx was written to be included in 'Capital', vol 1. But (for unknown reasons) it wasn't and remained unpublished until 1933 and little known until the 1960's.

¹⁰ Both terms are valid. We tend to use 'domination of capital', because 'domination' is a more common term than subsumption, but also because we are talking about domination of more than labor, about the domination of the whole 'civil society'.

¹¹ See: Marx, Results of the Immediate production process, Capital, vol.1, p.1026, Penguin ed.

“absolute surplus value”, in contrast to “relative surplus value”, resulting from the declining value of the paid part of the working day (relative to the value of the whole day). For him, the production of absolute surplus value is what characterizes the formal subsumption of labor in the first place.

The subsumption was “formal”, because the commodification of labor did not immediately change the content of the labor process. It went on as before, except now it was wage-labor. That does not mean that there was no technological evolution under formal domination. There were continuous improvements of the instruments of labor but they did not yet essentially change the labor process as such; labor power remained at the center of the production process. The focus on absolute surplus value reflected the external relation of the value-form to the labor process.

Likewise, the domination of capital over society in general remained formal. Capitalism controlled the state but the state, while serving capitalism’s political interests, largely remained outside the economy. The value-form had not yet penetrated society beyond the immediate process of capitalist production. That means that its impact on the realms of education, science, culture and other aspects of civil society remained external, so that they continued to have a considerable degree of autonomy. That was true too for the life of the working class outside of the work environment. This gave the class the space to create its own social, cultural and political organizations, including trade unions and mass parties. The need for these was great, given the constant conflict of interests between capital seeking to lengthen the work day and the working class, seeking to shorten it; and given capitalism’s tendency to push the price of labor under its value, to push the wage under the costs of living.

Yet despite the horrors the formal domination of capital inflicted, it also brought a slow, but steady, improvement of the standard of living, even for the working class. Productivity increased, not yet driven by technology, but by the fact that labor, subordinated to capital, became far more continuous, intensive and far more economically employed. Even though it was still low compared to the productivity which would be achieved under real

domination, there was a harmony between what the accumulation of value required and what capitalism was doing. The value-form was not as absurd as it has become today. The commodity as the form of social wealth made sense because its two sides, use-value and (exchange) value, followed the same growing curve. The growth of profit and employment went hand in hand, as did the expansion of real wealth and value-wealth. That doesn’t mean that there were no crises. But these were caused by uneven development (causing over- and underaccumulation) or by external factors such as bad harvests. There was not yet a conflict between what capitalism was doing – its ways of chasing profit -- and the value-form, the social construct or “objective abstraction”, on which it is based.

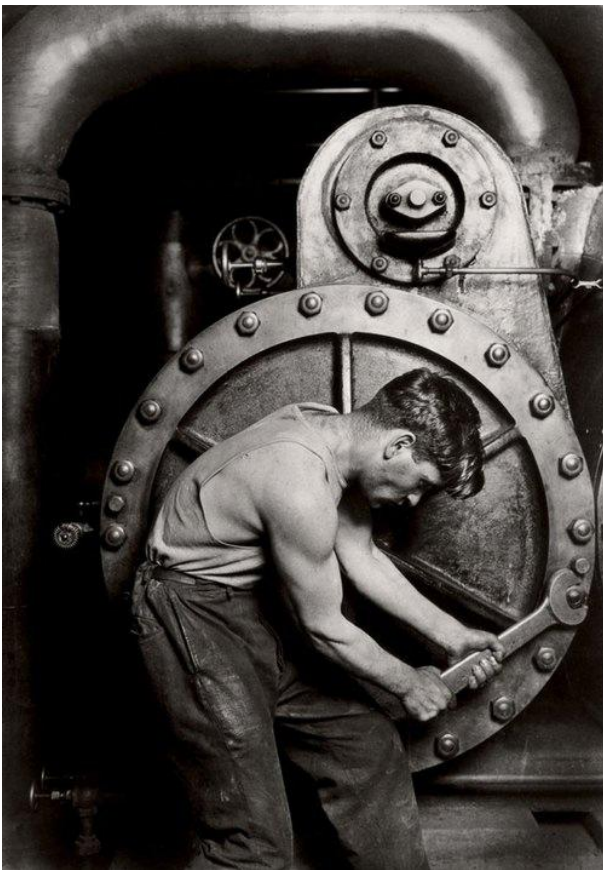
Real domination

14. Capitalism shifted its focus from the extraction of absolute surplus-value to relative surplus-value because it had to and it could. It had to, because of the physical limit to the extension of the work day. At some point, the capitalist had to take into consideration that he was destroying the very labor power on which he depends, if he was not yet forced to backtrack under the pressure of the resistance of his workers. But it also could, because of technological change. The prime mover of technological progress in capitalism is the possibility of surplus profit that a capitalist rakes in when he can bring the individual value of his product under its social (or market) value (on which its price is based). Thirst for this surplus profit spurs on every capitalist to seek technology that reduces the labor time-content of his commodity. It is not a matter of choice: those who don’t, lose their ability to compete, and perish. Technological innovation became the primary method of chasing profit. This revolutionized the production process and unleashed the productivity of labor. The value of labor power fell considerably (even though increasing in use values), while the intensity of the labor process increased, both factors yielding relative surplus value for capital.

Real domination does not alter the essential innovation brought about by formal domination (the direct submission of the labor process to capital), “but on this foundation now arises a technologically and otherwise

specific mode of production -- capitalist production -- which transforms the nature of the labor process and its actual conditions.”¹²

What does this mean? Nothing less than the greatest transformation of the labor process since man fashioned the first tool: a complete subject-object reversal in the relation man-technology. “In handicrafts and manufacture, the worker makes use of a tool; in the (modern) factory, the machine makes use of him. There, the movements of the instrument of labor proceed from him; here, it is the movements of the machine that he must follow. In manufacture the workers are part of a living mechanism. In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism which is independent of the workers who are incorporated into it as its appendages”.¹³



The machine becomes central (photo by Lewis Hines)

This allows a deep penetration of the law of value into the labor process. Whereas under formal domination, the labor day as a whole is a commodity with a value smaller than the value it creates and the gap can only be widened by lengthening the whole day, in real domination, the uniform motion of the machine is the measuring rod that quantifies every segment of the labor process and thereby subjects that every segment, even every motion, to pressure to squeeze more relative surplus value from it.

The transition to real domination opens the door to mass production, to an acceleration of the tendency towards an unceasing enlargement of the scale of production that already existed under formal domination. It extended from industry to industry, and made it not only possible for capitalism to spread geographically but compelled it to, since it requires an ever larger market for specifically capitalist products. One can discern different phases within the transition to real domination, from its ‘primitive period’ started by the so-called first industrial revolution, to its maturation in assembly line Fordist mass production and on to post-Fordist, information technology-based production. While the transition to the real domination of capital over society began in the industrial metropolises in the nineteenth century, its triumph, consolidation, and global spread, has been a twentieth century phenomenon, one that has transfigured the social landscape particularly over the past half-century and that continues now into the twenty-first century. It is not finished and will never be finished so long as capitalism exists. What prevents such a totality shaped by the law of value being a totalization from which there is no escape is that the law of value has its own internal contradictions that provide the bases for its overcoming.

15. Our view of the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital rests not just on Marx’s distinction between the extraction of absolute surplus-value and the extraction of relative surplus-value. The dynamic it describes, not only entails the law of value’s deep penetration of the production process but also its expansion from the economy to society as a totality; from the process of *production* to the processes of *reproduction* – the reproduction of the capitalist social relations, the core of which is the value-form. What that

¹² Marx, Results., op.cit., p 1034

¹³ Marx, Capital, vol.1, p.548

means, is that every pore of society is invaded and transformed by the operation of the law of value; that all the domains of social existence are tendentially reshaped by the value-form. From its original locus at the point of production, the law of value has systematically spread its tentacles to incorporate not just the actual production of commodities, but their circulation and consumption too. Moreover, it has come to preside over the spheres of the political and ideological, including science and technology. In its most developed phase, there is no longer any non-economic sphere, everything is tendentially integrated into the market and operates on the basis of the law of value (that does not mean of course that every activity is productive, valorizing capital). This inevitably changes both the content and form of all institutions that previously were standing outside the market and occupied a relatively autonomous space. Today, despite all their particularities, all political parties, trade unions, churches, cultural institutions, hospitals, universities, schools, foundations, interest groups, media, entertainment providers, services of all kinds, operate more or less like capitalist companies or subsidiaries thereof, with the corresponding structures, layers and divisions of labor, competing for their share of their respective markets, conquering or protecting their niche in the global market the world has become.

The process also entails the emergence of state capitalism, the integration of the state in the market in which it came to play the central, organizing role, which again changed both its function and form. This osmosis of state and economy is a 'natural' product of real domination. This process, by which the previously non-economic spheres of society are invaded by the law of value, unfolded gradually over time and unevenly, faster here, slower there. Tragically but inevitably, it conquered also the mass organizations that originated from within the working class, organs of struggle and self-defense as well as expressions of a relatively autonomous proletarian cultural and social life.

16. With respect to science and technology, the penetration of the law of value occurs not just through the transformation of scientific and technological research (and the institutions in which it takes place) into commodities, but especially through the infiltration of the value-

form, and its concomitant quantification, into reason itself (the triumph of a purely *instrumental* reason), and the reduction of all beings, nature and humans, to mere objects of manipulation and control.

The value-form penetrates consciousness too. It conquers the vast realm of *ideology*, understood not simply as false consciousness, illusion, or mystification, but rather as the complex of ideas, beliefs, and representations of the world, which shape the minds and *behavior* of individuals and social classes. As an imaginary relation to actual social relations, ideology cannot be separated from the *material* existence of human beings.

With the formal domination of capital, the law of value does not yet directly provide the bases for the subjectivation of the worker. Instead, capital simply takes the worker as he has been subjectivated in the pre-capitalist world, and merely adds the discipline of the factory, the foreman, and the bourgeois to the human subject as it has historically found him. The transition to the real domination of capital entails new modes of subjectivation in which the law of value and its quantification of all social relations are directly implicated. Not the pre-capitalist ideologies of crown and pulpit, or even the specifically proletarian ideologies (themselves linked to the pre-capitalist ideologies of artisan and *citoyen*), but specifically capitalist ideologies now shape the worker's representations of the world.

17. There is another aspect of the dynamic of the real domination of capital that must be mentioned here because of its impact on workers' consciousness: the increasing socialization of the labor process. The more or less individual labor processes of formal domination gave way to a collective labor process with technology at its center so that, as Marx wrote, "the real lever of the overall labor process is increasingly not the individual worker" but "labor power socially combined".

¹⁴ The production process becomes increasingly complex as technology fragments and recombines the labor process, creating many different functions. Today, it has become a global process. Many, if not most commodities result from labor done in several countries. Labor done by machine operators,

¹⁴ Marx, Results., op.cit. p 1040.

engineers, researchers, programmers, truckers, cleaners, cooks and so on: together they form what Marx called the '*gesamtarbeiter*', or 'collective worker' who creates through his combined labor the social wealth and the surplus value for capital. Because of the socialization of the whole process, "it is quite immaterial whether the job of a particular worker, who is merely a limb of this collective worker, is at a greater or smaller distance from the actual manual labor" [Ibid]. From the point of view of the workers, it's also immaterial whether the particular job one is assigned to is productive labor (labor that creates surplus value for capital) or not. For the accumulation of capital, the difference remains essential of course but the worker's condition does not change when he is moved from a productive to an unproductive task. Capitalism needs unproductive work done too, to manage society, and increasingly so. The collective worker therefore is not just the commodity- (and thus surplus value-) producing part of the working class but the whole class of proletarians (productive and unproductive, employed and unemployed) submitted to capital, in this age of hyper-socialized production and international connectivity. Only a material social force can revolutionize society. It is from the material existence of the collective worker that the possibility of communist revolution arises



Understanding Crisis

18. The transition to the real domination of capital brought the internal contradictions of capitalism, latently present during formal domination, to the surface. Following the path of value, the changes in the ways value is created and consumed, the extension of the value-form over society and over the world, we can see how these contradictions lead to crises, both cyclical and systemic. We can see why recurring massive loss and destruction of value through crisis and war became necessary for the value-system to survive. But we can also understand why in this period, the development of the productive forces not only continued but accelerated.

The Communist Left on the other hand, situated its crisis-analysis within the theoretical framework of traditional Marxism with its stage-ist, teleological view of history. Crisis-theory thus had to explain why capitalism had reached the point at which it could no longer develop the productive forces. The two theories that were most influential in the communist left were those developed by Rosa Luxemburg and Henryk Grossmann. Luxemburg sought the cause of the crisis in the contradiction between the conditions in which value is produced, and the conditions of its realization. She claimed that capitalism needs extra-capitalist markets to obtain the value to finance its expansion, so that it could no longer expand once those extra-capitalist areas have become capitalist themselves. Then, accumulation would become impossible. Grossmann, whose analysis was popularized in the communist left and expanded upon by Paul Mattick Sr., based his theory on Marx's view that the rising organic composition of capital – the decline of labor power relative to means of production -- gives rise to a tendential fall of the rate of surplus value extraction, and therefore also of the rate of profit. Grossmann tried to prove that this tendency would bring capitalism to the point at which the total mass of surplus value would become insufficient for accumulation to continue.

The latter-day Luxemburgists of course had to recognize that capitalism hadn't permanently collapsed and thus added the thesis that capitalism's shortage of buyers could be

alleviated temporarily by war and the demand generated by the need to reconstruct afterwards. And Grossmann recognized that crisis devalorizes capital and thereby sets the stage for a cyclical upturn, but he thought those upturns would become ever smaller until "the final crisis" ends it all.

On the nearness of this "final crisis," both camps agreed. Yet despite their common conclusions, the debates on crisis-theory in the communist left in the 1970's were often acrimonious. Some even claimed that those who didn't agree with their version were outside the revolutionary camp. But it's quite obvious that both theories suffer from a disconnect with reality. The history of the 20th century and beyond gives no indication of the existence of a point X at which accumulation stops. What it shows us is the simultaneous development of capitalist horror – social retrogression-- and of the productive forces. Both theories captured a part of the real picture. But they are like blind men, each touching one part of the elephant and trying to describe the animal.

19. We need to see the whole beast. The whole process of value becoming more value, becoming more value and so on. What makes it possible, and what disrupts it. Capital accumulation is the aggregate result of countless cycles with money at the beginning and more money at the end. In these cycles, value goes through several transformations. Money M transforms into productive commodities C; their productive use transforms the value into another quantity of commodities C', with a greater value than C (surplus-value is added), which then must transform into money M'. Then, for accumulation to continue, the cycle has to start over.

Crisis-theory must take as its starting point the very building block of capitalism, the commodity. Its dual nature, as use value and value. For the capitalist, the use-value is but the vehicle to the goal of more value. But he can't get rid of the use-value requirement, value remains chained to it. A commodity that loses its use-value loses its value as well. So the accumulation process requires that value and use-values grow in tandem, develop as a unified process. But real domination causes use-value and value, the two sides of the

commodity, to become unhinged. Use-values grow exponentially while value's growth becomes more difficult. The hunt for profit through technification is what causes these growing curves to diverge more and more. Real domination tells the capitalist to seek profit by replacing labor power with technology, while for capital as a whole, accumulation requires the growth of living labor, the only source of surplus value and thus ultimately, of all profit. Meanwhile giant leaps in productivity bring the productive capacity into conflict with the narrow basis on which the conditions of consumption in capitalism rest.

The result is a growing obsolescence of the value form, in the sense that its very characteristics increasingly become obstacles, both to the pursuit of profit and to the reproduction of society. A growing contrast appears between what can be and what is. With the progress of its real domination, capital, "on the one side, calls into life all the powers of science and of nature ... in order to make the creation of wealth (relatively) independent of the labor time employed on it. On the other side, it wants to use labor time as the measuring rod for the giant forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value." ¹⁵

This measuring rod has become absurd. This absurdity is plainly visible in the existence side by side of a vast oversupply of food and of widespread hunger, of a vast oversupply of housing and of massive homelessness, and on and on. On the one hand, the real domination of capital creates a global, intensely social, knowledge-based economy, with an immense capacity to create use values. On the other, all production must jump through the hoop of the value form and real domination narrows that hoop. The production must be profitable in value-terms, contain a large enough quantity of unpaid labor time, even though the quantity of labor time is no longer what determines productiveness. The creation of real wealth no longer depends on surplus value. According to Marx, "As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must

¹⁵ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.706 (Penguin ed.)

cease to be the measure] of use value".¹⁶ Well yes, logically it must, but that doesn't mean it will happen "as soon as..." A revolution is required. Still, the impact on consciousness of the growing absurdity of the value form is a material factor in the maturation of the conditions for revolution.

Capitalism's crisis does not lead to revolution but it's hard to imagine how revolution could occur without its pressure. The impact of the growing tension within the commodity –the tendential unhooking of value and use value– on the accumulation of capital is what makes this crisis inevitable. In contrast to the competing crisis-theories of the Communist Left, who see the genesis of the crisis in one phase of the cycle of value only, IP's analysis shows that all phases of the cycle are affected by the obsolescence of the value form. C-C' by the tendential decline of living labor –and thus also of surplus value– in production, C'-M', by the use value-limits imposed on productive consumption, and M'-C", by the incentive created by this fetishist system for money to stay money and to swell until the bubble bursts.

In the longer version of this text (which will be published on our website) IP's crisis theory is presented more fully (points 20 to 22). For lack of space and patience, we skip to point 23.



Value must fall to survive

23. So a general crisis hits value-accumulation at three points of transformation in its cycle. To overcome it and restore the conditions for accumulation, the value-form demands action on all three fronts. The components of production must devalorize to create more room for surplus value in the value-

composition of the product. Weaker competitors must disappear to restore conditions for relative scarcity. The financial hoard must be devalued to reduce its burden on the economy, its claims on new value.

If left unattended, the crisis by itself would accomplish these tasks over time. But the more the contradictions of the value form have developed, the more intolerable a social price this would entail. A *laissez faire* policy would be impossible to maintain because of the chaos, the massive social disruptions and the threat of revolutionary uprisings. Even the capitalist class would resist it and demand protection from devalorization.

But there is a more "orderly" way to achieve these goals, on the condition that capitalism has a strong enough grip on the consciousness of the working class to impose it. Global war can finish the job that the crisis started. The states that wage global war are not conspiring to restore the conditions for accumulation; rather they want to escape devalorization by means of conquest, plunder, control over markets and resources. But regardless of their intentions, they realize the massive destruction of value which the accumulation process requires. They all lose more than they win in a global war but the value system emerges triumphant.

There is no historic law that compels the capitalist class to react to general crisis with global war. Still, the very nature of the crisis explains the necessity of a massive destruction of value for the survival of the value system. But the forms that this destruction takes are not a given. Global war is not the only possibility. Today, it may even be unlikely. But a combination of destructive factors -- the direct effects of the crisis itself, regional wars, pandemics and massive ecological disasters -- could achieve the same results, and their consequences would be equally horrific, threaten the very survival of our species.

From World War I to the crisis today

24. Did this necessity of destruction exist when World War I broke out? It didn't, or at least not yet urgently. There was no general crisis but there were signs that the transition to real domination was bringing the contradictions of the value-form to the surface.

¹⁶ Marx, Grundrisse, p. 703

In the longer version of this text on our website, we analyse in some detail how they manifested themselves in the different phases of the cycle of value at the eve of World War I, even though they had not yet provoked a global systemic crisis. But apart from necessity, we must also consider the possibility created by real domination: the possibility to apply mass production technology to military production, the possibility to make use of a vast supply of recruits, already subjectivated for their role by the collective discipline of factory-work, all of which allowed capitalism to wage war considerably more effectively than before. But to explain why World War I happened when it did, as well as how it developed, a great number of factors have to be taken into account, including the weight of the past on the capitalist class, of an entire history in which economic gains and territorial conquest went hand in hand, of the successes of protectionism which reinforced the idea that state power was the key to market expansion. Other contingent factors played a role. However, instead of seeing those as competing explanations, we should look at how these factors interacted within the context of a slowly building need to devalorize, caused by the maturation of the contradictions of the value-form.

A systemic devalorization, a vast destruction of value, did not have to happen in 1914. But it did. It marked indeed the beginning of a new phase in the trajectory of capital, in which expansive growth would again and again lead to the necessity of massive value destruction. We no longer call this period “decadence”, since this term is derived from, and points to, traditional Marxism’s teleological stage-ist view of history. Instead, we have been using terms like “capitalism’s era of social retrogression”, which focuses on the fact that in this period, while capitalism continues to grow and develop the productive forces, a stark antagonism develops between capitalist needs and social needs, between the survival of the value form and the survival of humankind.

In the longer version of this text, we look closer at what happened in the cycle of value since 1914, how the transformations within it occurred and ran into obstacles. We analyse the role that the two world wars played and examine their very different aftermaths. We

look at the restructuring of capital, within the production process and beyond it, at the conditions of the post WW2-boom and the reappearance of the obstacles to the transformation of value. For lack of space, we skip over these points (25 to 28) and move directly to the end of the 1970’s. There was a crisis of profit, a crisis of overcapacity, a financial crisis. The three points of transformation of value were blocked. Hyperinflation threatened to cause another depression. At the start of the 1980’s most left communists thought that this was about to happen.¹⁷ As it turned out, they were mistaken.

New growth...

29. Instead, a new phase of growth began. It’s true that it was preceded by a sharp recession, triggered by the curtailment, to rein in inflation, of money creation and thus of credit. It’s also true that the growth-rate never recovered to the level of the three post-war decades. Nevertheless, overall it was an expansive phase which lasted until 2007. Furthermore, it was a period of accelerated transformation and development of the productive forces – an impossibility according to the dogma of decadence. How was this recovery possible without war or depression?

What happened was a confluence of factors, some resulting directly from the further development of the real domination of capital, others political in nature.

The change in strategy of the capitalist class since the 1980’s is often called “neo-liberalism”. The term is misleading because it suggests a return to *laissez faire*, a withdrawal of the state from intervention in the economy. That never happened. The fact that the state continued to consume a lions-share of the economy, in some countries more than half, says enough. But the state did pull back from trying to force $C' - M'$. The money-growth declined in circulation, which cooled the inflation, but it increased in the form of public debt. The policies of privatization were a part

¹⁷ At the beginning of the 1980’s, the ICC declared, in all its publications, that this would be “the Decade of Truth”, in which the battles would take place that would decide whether the world would move to war or to revolution. **It later never recognized that it was wrong.**

of the de-concentration that was occurring in the production process in general. The Fordist concept of a vertically integrated concentration of production forces, shaped by continuous scale enhancement, gave way to the tendency to spread out production sites, outsource parts of the production process to different companies in different parts of the globe, develop redundant sources of supply, etc. This was done to economize, to increase efficiency and so on, but also to reduce capital's vulnerability to workers' resistance, which had been felt so sharply in the preceding decade. It served to reduce the paralyzing effect of interruptions of the chain of production. It served to break up the concentration of workers, the power that emerged when large numbers of workers come together against the same enemy, and the threat that this holds for capitalism. In the Eastern bloc, where class struggle opposed the workers immediately to the state, the same vulnerability appeared starkly, especially in Poland.

The same change also reflected capitalists' desire to reduce their dependence on scale-enhancement. Given the chronic overcapacity of the world economy since the end of the post-WWII boom, and its drag on the profit-rate, the hunt for surplus-profit directed capital away from Fordism's focus on increasing the volume of production, towards seeking a new relative scarcity by producing new commodities (producer and consumer goods), that give it a monopolistic or semi-monopolistic market-position and thus a surplus-profit. Developed capital became increasingly dependent on this way of obtaining surplus-value. Even though such market-positions are temporary, brisk paces of technological innovation, or of market-campaigns that transform an ordinary sneaker into a highly desirable "Air Jordan", assure the continuity of a competitive advantage.

This was a mighty stimulus for technological development and especially for the spread of information technology (IT) which placed automatization, rather than mechanical technology, at the nexus of post-Fordist production. One of its consequences was a rapid decline of the costs of transportation and communication, lowering production costs and thus providing a growing potential to spread out production.

Meanwhile, the world market continued to broaden. Obstacles to 'free trade' and the international mobility of financial capital fell away. After the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc and China's change of course, Russia, China and the countries they controlled were integrated into the world market.



Assembly workers in China

These political and technological changes opened the door for what's been called "globalization," which expanded value creation because the rate of exploitation of labor power increased. Globalization not only made the capitalist world market more unified and thus wider and more efficient, but it also restructured production on a global assembly line. Its essential virtue for capitalism was the unprecedented potential for combining the technology and production methods of developed capitalism with labor power whose value is determined by the living conditions in underdeveloped countries. This raised the rate of surplus-value both directly and indirectly for other capitals, by lowering the value of the commodities their workers need and thus raising relative surplus value, thereby counter-acting the tendential fall of the rate of profit. Thus a large part of Fordist production (assembly-line work) moved to previously underdeveloped parts of the world, while the industry that remained in the advanced countries moved increasingly towards post-Fordism. Furthermore, the realistic threat to move production to other countries changed the rapport de forces between the classes and discouraged working class resistance to exploitation, which raised the rate of profit.

The new technology and political changes did not only make possible a geographical extension of the reach of the value-form, but also facilitated its much deeper penetration of the economy. This was most striking in the transformation of many services into surplus value producing, capitalist production, opening new fields of expansion for value accumulation.

...New crisis

30. Every wave of technological innovation leads to a phase of homogenization, in which the new production methods spread and become the norm, determining the social value of commodities. Then, opportunities for surplus profits dwindle. The new norm implies a lesser role for living labor in production, and surplus value is but a part of that living labor. So the homogenization pulls the average rate of profit down. The IT-driven technological revolution expelled more labor power than it integrated. Furthermore, the fast pace of innovation accelerated “moral depreciation,” the need to replace the means of production by more advanced technology, long before the older one is worn out. This hidden overproduction of constant capital was also a major drag on the profit-rate.

Nowhere is the declining value of production more striking than in the most emblematic sector of post-Fordist production: digital commodities. There is no doubt that they play a crucial and ever growing role in the creation of use-values today. But, although they may yield high profits for the capitals that produce them, they create very little value. What Marx wrote about machines: “however young and full of life the machine may be, its value is no longer determined by the necessary labour-time actually objectified in it, but by the labour-time necessary to reproduce either it or a better machine”¹⁸ is also true for them. Since the labor time required to reproduce them (to copy them) is close to nothing, they contain very little surplus-value. The profits made with their sale are surplus-profits, resulting from monopoly-positions, protected by patents and copyrights. If they wouldn’t be, they would fall like a stone. They are in effect abundant and can only be made profitable by sabotaging the law of value, by limiting competition to prevent

the market from establishing their prices. Software therefore clearly expresses the absurdity of the perpetuation of the value-form. On the one hand, it can raise productiveness and the versatility of production and thus real wealth enormously, on the other hand, it makes value, capitalist wealth, decline. On the one hand, it is a means to obtain surplus-profits, enforced by the state rather than the market, and on the other, because of its social nature and its almost valueless reproducibility, it resists commodification and invites sharing; distribution no longer based on the value-form.

Not only in software, but in all sectors, capitalists try to escape from the tendentially declining general rate of profit by cheating the law of value, by obtaining exclusive market positions that shelter them from competition. What threatened their profits the most was the growing overcapacity resulting from the productiveness that the new technology made possible. So they seek an artificial recreation of scarcity that enables them to sell their commodities above their value. They seek monopolies and achieve them through a concentration of capital and/or through exclusive reproduction rights. This entails a shift in the focus of profit making, from the production of goods to the production of innovation, of new knowledge for the production of goods; from the economies of scale to the goal of constant adaptation, constant recreation of scarcity. As a result, the growth of patents, after following a slow but steady course since the late 19th century, exploded in the 1980’s. Intellectual property rights became a keystone in the international trade agreements concluded since, and both the US and Europe repeatedly lengthened their duration. There are patents on everything. Even a part of our genes now fall under patents and cannot be studied without paying a license to their “owner”. That is quite profitable for him and other patent-holders. Patents last on average 20 years and can be renewed, while it takes a pharmaceutical company typically 1 to 3 years to recoup the R&D costs of new products. But since these monopolists sell their commodities above their value, the bulk of their profit does not come from producing these goods but from elsewhere: it is paid by their customers. That’s why it is a fallacy to think that a global advanced economy based on

¹⁸ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 528

artificial scarcity could function on a parallel level, sheltered from the general crisis. It sucks value from elsewhere and thus effectively taxes the rest of the economy. The more it takes in, the heavier the tax. It is therefore dependent on the capacity of the rest of the economy to pay that tax, and thus on its ability to create new value.

31. The cheap labor power in what used to be the periphery of the capitalist world remains a strong tonic for the profit-rate. But by penetrating these lands, the value-form is changing them. And with this change, the value of labor power shoots up. The consumer goods seen as necessary for its reproduction inevitably expand in the context of life in a technified urban environment. Furthermore, the young proletariat in these countries has discovered the power of collective struggle. So wages are rising in China, Vietnam and other countries. And the working class there is also increasingly resisting other consequences of capitalism's ruthless plunder for profit, such as unsafe working conditions and the poisoning of its environment. So capital's capacity to combine modern technology with ever-lower wages, has reached limits which erode this factors' counter-acting effect to the decline of the general rate of profit.

32. Capitalism's apologists hoped that globalization would generate its own expanding market. And indeed, to some extent it did that; it enriched and expanded the size of middle-income strata in many parts of the world, which encouraged a credit-expansion on the assumption of its continuation. But the Asian financial crisis in 1997 showed that much of the profit resulting from exploitation in low wage countries could not profitably be reinvested in those countries. Three years later, the implosion of the 'dot.com bubble' revealed the limits of IT's capacity to provide value an endless field for growth. In both cases, over-accumulation led to a sharp crisis, in which trillions disappeared. Deflation impoverished many countries. Yet the impact of these crises remained limited. The world economy was still expanding.

But its expansion was kept going by cheap credit in the advanced countries. It made them, and especially the US, the essential market of the last resort. A pattern had developed: the US economy every year lived more beyond its

means, consuming more than it produced, paying by printing more dollars, backed by public debt notes bought by the countries who sell more to it than they buy from it. Neither side can withdraw from this relationship without devastating consequences. The US could do this because the world is trading in its currency, and is hoarding it in its banks for its own sake, as means of payment for future use, a debt owed to the future.

Owners of capital in the weaker countries, confronted by the limitations of reinvesting their profits at home, and by the danger of devaluation of money hoarded in their own currency, increasingly moved their savings to safer places. In the mid-2000's, 80 % of the net-savings of the world were flowing to the US. The combined demand of international capital for safety pushed up the price of all financial assets in the US, and to a lesser extent elsewhere. Thus, opportunities grew to accomplish $M - M'$, to make money grow by itself. In many creative ways, a great variety of financial "instruments" were invented to meet the demand for dollar-denominated carriers of value.

It made it possible to continue the expansion for a few more years. The asset-inflation created a "wealth effect", most notably in housing, encouraging their owners to consume more. It counteracted the tendential overcapacity, by giving money other destinations than productive investment, and counteracted inflation by sucking excess money out of general circulation. And it made the rich even richer -- especially the traders in money and everything that can be easily monetized. But inevitably, because the hoard is a debt owed to the future, the upward growth-curve of capital in the hoard met the downward growth-curve of the creation and productive realization of new value.

A crisis of faith

33. The current crisis was triggered by massive over-accumulation of financial capital. But the reason why it occurred runs deeper than the greediness of bankers or the short-sightedness of politicians (though there were plenty of both). It is the obsolescence of the value-form that explains this disconnection between symbolic value and real wealth. The value-form is the cause of its own obsolescence because it

transformed the production process in ways that made the creation and realization of value increasingly difficult; that made the value-form increasingly incapable of representing real



The house on fire

wealth. It is these obstacles that make money refrain from accomplishing $M - C$ and stay in the hoard.

The capacity of the hoarded value (regardless whether it takes the form of bank deposits, bonds, stocks, treasury notes, mortgages or gold etc.) to represent real wealth is, ultimately, a matter of collective belief; the belief that abstract value is in itself real wealth. It isn't. But it is a claim on wealth and when the claim grows at an ever greater speed while the growth of wealth is stalling, because it must, but can't grow in value, the belief begins to falter.

It falters first where the disconnection between the expanding value financial capital is supposed to represent, and the reality on the ground, is the most glaring. But once the belief is wavering, the danger of contagion is great, as one disconnect exposes another. Thus the crisis moves from housing to the banking sector, from the private sector to the state. The danger arises that the loss of faith in the permanence of abstract value leads to a

collapse of the value in the hoard. When the money in the hoard loses its capacity to represent wealth, it cannot function in circulation either. That would make a global breakdown unavoidable. To prevent this from happening is, therefore, the greatest priority of capitalism.

Its strategy against the crisis -- austerity measures and stimulus measures -- is seemingly contradictory, expressing its lack of alternatives; indeed, the first aims to rein in the growth of debt, the second expands it. The second stimulates economic growth, while the first shrinks it. But both are designed to benefit the owners of capital and both are undertaken in the first place to defend the credibility of the hoard and therefore of value itself.

The concentration of capital to which real domination has led, implies the need for huge streams of capital in order to compete, to function as part of the world market, to finance the role of the state in the accumulation process. The loss of credibility in the hoard of a particular country -- in its ability to maintain the value invested in it as value, in its ability to carry its debts -- leads to a flight of capital, crushing interest rates, paralyzing the economy. Therefore, the weaker players have no choice but to cut their spending drastically, at the expense of the working class, to make room for debt service, to remain able to attract capital.

But the stimulus-measures, by and large, have the same purpose: to defend the credibility of the hoard. Since 2008, the crisis has destroyed many trillions. This was, from the point of view of the need to restore the conditions for value-accumulation, a good start. But since then, many more trillions have been created. The US, the EC, China, Japan and the so-called emerging countries all launched into a mind-boggling monetary expansion, a gigantic increase of government debt. The aim of the stimulus measures was not to increase the spending power of the general population but to prop up the credibility of the hoard. The US, having the most leeway given the dollar's position as the global currency and the safe haven-effect, has been taking the lead. Its central bank, the Fed, has bought, with money created out of thin air, trillions worth of bonds and other securities, including state-debt, in

order to prop up their prices. It has forked over hundreds of billions to the banks and big companies. It has forced interest rates down to near zero, to inflate demand with cheap credit. The low return on bank deposits also chases household savings towards riskier financial assets. All this makes the stock markets rise, proof of a renewed confidence in the hoard, and makes the rich even richer. The “wealth-effect” stimulates consumption, enough for a feeble recovery.

But nothing is solved. The problem is shoved into the future in a way that guarantees its return with a vengeance. The law of value demands a massive devalorization from capitalism, and capitalism responded with the most massive expansion of money in its history.

Meanwhile, nothing has improved in regard to the creation of value. Even without the specter of global depression, the prospect would be dire. The means of production continue to develop, to increase in productiveness and versatility, but all the cutting edge developments, such as robotics, biotechnology, 3-D printing, point in the direction of a further expulsion of living labor from production and therefore also of a further decline of surplus-value production. The ever-growing part of the world’s population that is excluded from the global assembly line is not an industrial reserve army but a human mass which becomes an insuperable *burden* to capital, one that it must maintain and control until or unless it can *dispose* of it.

The other crisis

34. The current economic crisis is converging with a devastating ecological crisis. Different as they are, they both have their roots in the value-form, in the progress of the real domination of capital, in the way it shapes production and consumption.

Half of all the fossil fuels ever consumed on earth, have been consumed since 1980. The poisoning of the atmosphere, and its impact on

the climate, has been scientifically established. Yet this knowledge does not alter what capitalism does. On the contrary, its polluting practices worsen. The tendential exhaustion of fossil fuels creates surplus profit opportunities in energy production, which are eagerly seized, regardless of the consequences: such as bio fuels (at the expense of food production), heavily polluting shale oil extraction, gas fracking (poisoning drinking water), arctic drilling (releasing massive amounts of carbon into the atmosphere), and so on. Meanwhile, development of non- or less polluting energy yields much less profit so it remains an afterthought.

The tendential exhaustion is not limited to fossil fuels but threatens other resources too, even water. Its growing scarcity may well become a reason for war in different parts of the world.

Just as the signs are crystal clear that capitalism can’t continue to pile on more debt without causing an economic catastrophe, the signs are crystal clear that it cannot continue its polluting ways of producing and consuming without causing an ecological catastrophe. And yet in both cases, it cannot stop. And so to catastrophes it drags the world.

Climate-change, rather than war, may be the instrument of destruction that the value form would “use” in the 21st century to survive. Whether humankind would survive, and if so in what conditions, is another matter.

35. The convergence of those two crises is unprecedented. Yet the mortal danger that it represents to our species, the direct attack that it is on the working class, does not assure revolution. Even a global collapse of the capitalist economy would not automatically lead to the collapse of the capitalist system, or of the value-form. While the crisis itself is inevitable, its outcome is not. But the crisis will shatter the “normalcy” of economic growth, the faith in the benefits of science and technology, the self-evident nature of the value-form.

IP and the Tradition of the Communist Left Part 3

Understanding Revolution



Illustration by William Balfour

36. The inability of the historical communist left to grasp the actual trajectory of capitalism since the 1920's, its failure to focus on the value-form and its contradictions, its inability to provide a theory of the real domination of capital and its implications, must now lead us to address what Internationalist Perspective sees as the failure of the communist left to provide a theory of revolution and a vision of communism consonant with the abolition of the value-form. Despite its defense of internationalism and worker's democracy, the communist left remained imprisoned within the theoretical edifice of traditional Marxism with respect to its vision of a dictatorship of the proletariat and a period of transition. For both the Italian and the Dutch-German left, the vision of communism was that of a "republic of labor," of communism as an

affirmation of the proletariat as a class, the goal of which was the liberation *of* labor, not the liberation *from* labor. And the Russian revolution, with its general strikes, its factory occupations, its Soviets, remained the model for how a future communist revolution would occur.

The Italian left has always defended the first two congresses of the Communist International, including Lenin's "Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution," which instantiated the leading role of the party in the revolution, a document consonant with Lenin's long established view that the mass of the proletariat was only capable of a trade-unionist consciousness. Thus, the "Rome Theses," largely written by Bordiga, adopted by the Italian Communist

Party in 1922, claimed that: “The party’s role is ... to organize the material requirements for activity and to lead the proletariat in the development of its struggle,” The theoretical bases for the dictatorship of the single party was already contained in that document at the historical moment that the fate of the proletarian revolution in Europe still hung in the balance. Yet 15 years later, as the Stalinist counter-revolution consolidated its triumph, the Belgian Fraction of the International Communist Left reiterated that vision of a party dictatorship in its own “Declaration of Principles:” “In order to attain its historic objective -- the extinction of classes -- the proletariat must establish its own dictatorship under the direction of its class party. As the party is nothing other than the most conscious fraction of the proletariat, its interests cannot be differentiated from those of that class. It expresses the interests of the whole of the class, their final social goal. By definition, and from the point of view of historic reality, there is an absolute identification between the dictatorship of the class and the dictatorship of the party.” That basic vision would guide the Italian left, then constituted as the Internationalist Communist Party, formed in the aftermath of World War Two under Bordiga’s theoretical leadership, a vision that would face a challenge from within, in 1952, led by Onorato Damen, who argued that “... the dictatorship of the proletariat can in no sense be reduced to the dictatorship of the party, even if this is the party of the proletariat, the intelligence and guide of the proletarian state.” Damen’s vision, then, was that of a dictatorship of the proletariat exercised by a Council State, though one in which the single party would nonetheless play the leading role. The Gauche Communiste de France, which also emerged from the pre-war Italian left in exile, and which provided the theoretical bases for the formation of the ICC, added another innovation to the understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat by advancing the idea that there is a distinction between the *state* in the period of transition to communism, and the *dictatorship* of the proletariat exercised by the Soviets or worker’s councils. In none of these visions did the *self-abolition* of the proletariat in the very course of a revolutionary upheaval, play a role, though Bordiga had always insisted -- against both Lenin and Trotsky -- that the continued

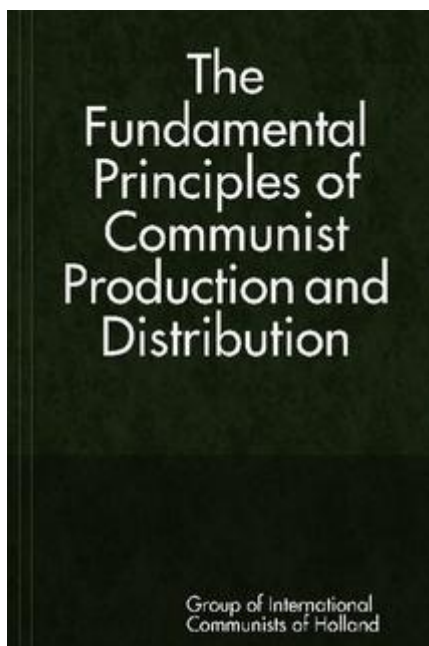
existence of wages and money would be a mortal threat to proletarian rule, and reproduce capitalist social relations. In all these visions arising from the Italian left, revolution and the period of transition to communism was always envisaged as the moment of the establishment of the rule, the dictatorship, of the proletariat.

No ‘period of transition’

37. The Dutch-German left by contrast firmly rejected a party dictatorship, as well as the vision of the Communist party or parties as the locus of class consciousness. For the KAPD, the AAUD, and the AAUD-E, for Gorter, Pannekoek, Otto Rühle, and Henk Canne Meijer, the mass organs of the class, the worker’s councils, constituted the proletarian dictatorship, not the party, and class consciousness was not brought to the proletariat from the “outside,” by professional revolutionaries, by a party. However, while the Dutch-German left battled against the idea of the party dictatorship or even the leading role of the party, advancing the idea in the 1930’s that the most class conscious workers and revolutionaries should organize communist “working groups” to advance their vision of revolution and communism in an historic moment of triumphant counter-revolution, its vision of revolution and communism remained that of a dictatorship of the worker’s councils, a council republic, as the concretization of the rule of the proletariat, and the transition to communism.

Perhaps the most detailed vision of a transition to communism advanced by the historical communist left was produced by the Dutch-German left, the GIC (Groups of Internationalist Communists) in 1930, *The Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution*. There the Dutch-German left advanced the idea that communist production and distribution would be strictly based on *labor-time accounting*, its standard being socially necessary labor time, with the distribution of that part of the products of proletarian labor -- now universalized -- that cannot yet be based on the principle “to each according to his needs” taking place through a system of “labor vouchers” [*Empfangsscheinen*] strictly based on the

number of hours each proletarian had worked. In contrast, then, to the normal working of the capitalist system, where the market determines socially necessary labor-time through exchange, *post festum*, in communist production that determination would be made “rationally,” by a system of accounting without the intermediary of exchange. Yet, however democratic a system of labor-time accounting undertaken by the worker’s councils might be, a key factor in determining how much of the social wealth an individual worker could receive (minus, of course, that portion of labor-time needed to produce goods and services not destined for individual consumption, the social fund) would be how much labor-time each proletarian had worked. Again, no matter how democratic the workers councils were in their accounting and in their determination of how much labor-time had to go to the social fund, such a system of labor vouchers assumed that differing needs (the size of a family, its health, etc.) were excluded as a basis for distribution. The labor voucher, then, constitutes a *wage* under a different name, one which takes no account of the actual *needs* of its recipients. Moreover, such a system still left the working class subjugated to the clock, to labor-time, one of the bases of capitalism and the value-form, and integral to its social relations.



The theoretical basis for the GIC’s vision of communism, the jewel of the historic communist left, is to be found in Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), where in criticizing the newly adopted program of the German Social-Democracy, he articulated a vision of a post-revolutionary world, in which there was first a lower stage of communism, and then as a result of such a period of transition, a higher stage. It is to that vision of Marx’s, a theoretical cornerstone of traditional Marxism, as well as of the communist left, that we must now turn.

38. While many of Marx’s manuscripts for the critique of political economy, texts in which he analyzed the value-form and the real domination of capital, remained unpublished until the twentieth century, his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, constituted Marx’s clearest published statement on the transition to communism. For Marx, in the lower stage of communism, “just as it emerges from capitalist society,” still stamped by its structures and social forms, “the individual producer gets back from society ... exactly what he has given to it.”¹ In Marx’s vision, then, the worker will receive the full *value* of his/her labor. And as Marx, acknowledged: “Clearly, the same principle is at work here as that which regulates the exchange of commodities as far as this is an exchange of equal values. ... a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for the same amount in another.”² For Marx, then, the value-form would still preside over both production and distribution in the lower stage of communism, and only in its higher stage “can society wholly cross the narrow horizon of bourgeois right and inscribe on its banner: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!”³ Communism, then, as the abolition of the value-form in all its modes, would be preceded by a post-capitalist stage in which the law of value and labor-time accounting still regulated production and consumption. However, radical Marx’s prescriptions seemed in 1875, and however they may have shaped the vision of the communist left a half century later,

¹ Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in Karl Marx, *The First International and After* (Penguin Books), p.346. This would be the basis for the GIC’s vision of communism as well.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.* p. 347.

today in a capitalist world in which the reproduction of the collective worker is threatened by the very existence of the value-form and the real subsumption of the collective worker to capital, such a perspective is completely *inadequate* even as a starting point for a vision of communism. Indeed, that perspective re-produces the very social forms – value, abstract labor, and labor-time accounting – that communism must immediately abolish lest capitalist social relations simply assume new political and administrative forms. If the exchange of equivalents – labor for consumer goods -- still prevails, then as Marx acknowledged in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*: “...equal right still constantly suffers a bourgeois limitation,”⁴ and labor itself remains proletarian labor. Moreover, the universalization of the proletarian condition, and the reduction of all labor to a homogeneous *abstract* labor, far from striking a blow at the reign of capital and the value-form, can only perpetuate and even perfect it.

The revolutionary subject

39. What, then, are the broad outlines of Internationalist Perspective’s vision of communism, one based on the analysis of the social retrogression wrought by the present phase of the real domination of capital; a vision of communism as the antithesis of the value-form and labor-time accounting? Within the political milieu of communization theory over the past decade there has arisen a wide-ranging discussion of revolution and communism, to which we have already pointed in part one of this text.⁵ Communization theory has focused on the link between Marx’s analysis of the value-form, abstract labor, and the historical trajectory of capital in the present epoch, *and* the tasks of revolution and the understanding of communism.

With respect to revolution, there is a tendency within the communization milieu to question whether the working class today can even be the “subject” of revolution. At a meeting to present the journal SIC in Athens in 2012, Blaumachen pointed to some basic

characteristics of the current cycle of struggles: “The first is the decline, to the point of extinction today, of the workers’ identity. There is no longer any prospect on the basis of any workers’ identity. This, however, is the *revolutionary dynamic* of present struggles, which in several cases brings to the surface the drastic refusal of the proletarian condition (struggles without demands, and struggles with demands that develop into violent conflicts without a prospect of compromise).”⁶ *Who*, then is engaged in the struggles if it is not the collective worker? The objective of the struggle, conscious or not at its outset, is not the perpetuation of the proletarian condition, wage-labor, and the class engaged in struggle has an identity which will become increasingly conscious as struggles broaden and expand, for if it does not, those struggles will be crushed or recuperated by capital. For us, that identity, as a collective worker, however submerged it is by the *subjectivation* of the worker by capital, as a consumer, a citizen, or on the basis of race, gender, or ethnicity, (another facet of capital’s real domination), is not a *fait accompli*, a definitive triumph of capital, and certainly not cause for celebration by communists. It is true that the *social physiognomy* of the collective worker in the old industrial heartlands of the “West” has been transformed since the 1970’s, and the beginning of the end of the Fordist epoch there.⁷ But in that same social space new industries, new modes for the production of *value* and its extraction from the collective worker have arisen, and with it new possibilities for proletarian class struggle against the ravages of capitalist crisis. And in that social space too, the diminution of the Fordist mass worker, has also led to the creation of a planet of slums in which a huge mass of those excluded from permanent jobs and now marginalized constitute another segment of the collective worker. At the same time, in the vast social space dominated by a peasant mass only half a century ago (China, Korea, South-East Asia, the Indian sub-continent, Latin America, and parts of Africa) both extractive and manufacturing industries

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.346

⁵ See “Internationalist Perspective and the Tradition of the Communist Left” in *Internationalist Perspective*, number 57, p. 21.

⁶ “Presentation of the Sic journal in Athens” on libcom.org

⁷ To take a striking example, at Fiat’s main plant, Mirafiori, in Torino, 50 thousand workers were employed in the 1970’s; by contrast before the most recent layoffs, the figure was under 6 thousand.

have arisen, and with them the creation of new centers of proletarian labor. It is that very identity as a collective worker on the basis of which a refusal of the continuation of the proletarian condition can emerge.

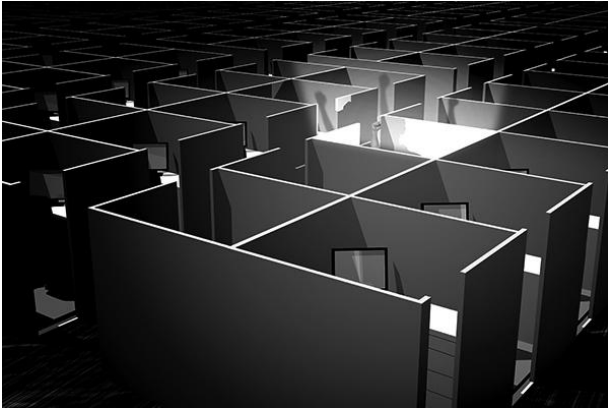
For Blaumachen, and some others within the communization milieu, though, it seems as if the working class has been liquidated, liquidated by capital economically, politically, and in terms of its very identity. Indeed that view has given rise to a theory of the present epoch as the “era of riots,” with a focus on the urban riots of those *excluded* from proletarian labor, whose riots often take the form of looting and the destruction of “things;” frequently the destruction of the buildings in which the inadequate state institutions which contain the excluded are located (schools, day care centers, recreational centers, etc.) More recently with the eruption of popular struggles in Turkey, Brazil, Chile, rebellions of youth, and especially students, occupying the streets and public spaces, typically involving democratic demands, have come to the fore, and are being incorporated into the theory of the era of riots. That such riots are expressions of the rage, the anger, the frustration, and revolt of strata of the collective worker; that they are the direct result of the depredations of capital, and of the operation of the law of value, seems clear. However, two fundamental questions arise. First, limited to the excluded and to youth/students, what perspective is there for the transformation of riots or popular struggles into communist revolution? Second, why has the proletariat at the “point of production” seemingly been “banished” from a revolutionary upheaval, in this purported “era of riots,” by some communizers? The riots of the excluded, however violent they are, have been contained (in France, the UK, more recently in Sweden, for example), and have neither posed a threat to capital and its state, nor generalized, or even assumed the temporary form of local communes. The youth/student struggles have been explicitly democratic in their demands, apart from small groups of anarchists (the black blocs), and in that respect resemble traditional demand struggles; indeed in Greece, Turkey, and Brazil they have drawn in the trade union confederations in symbolic (typically one day) “general strikes,” the outcome of which has been their recuperation and incorporation into the democratic structures of the capitalist state

-- processes through which the power of capital vastly increases. What is too often missing in these popular struggles, what prevents them from escaping the control of capital, is the absence of that kind of discussion and debate in the occupied spaces in which it is capitalist social relations themselves, and not simply corruption, greed, and authoritarian rule, that is put in question.

Though the point of production today is global, and while it increasingly involves intellectual, and not just manual, labor, it is no less *central* to capitalism as a social formation than it was a century ago. And the role of the collective worker at the point of production will be decisive in the unfolding of the revolutionary upheavals to come. It is at the key points of production and the communication “circuits” that are vital to it, that decisive blows against capital and its social forms can alone be struck.

Such blows, however, depend on more than just the degradation of existence under modern capitalism. The subjectivation of the collective worker, its production as a subject -- indeed of humankind -- by capital, its cultural and political subjugation, the difficulties of the collective worker in seeing that the value-form is historical, not “natural,” and that its continued existence entails ever-deepening crises, are all formidable obstacles to the development of its consciousness, and the strongest weapons that capital possesses. So long as the roots of these struggles are seen to be national or racial oppression, or authoritarian and non-democratic political rule, capitalism can, and will, contain and recuperate them. Here the very class lines that the historical communist left so courageously drew with respect to nationalism, the left, and democracy, need to be acknowledged, and drawn upon, by those who espouse communization today. While the “logic” of capital, and its unfolding, raises doubts and questions, those doubts and questions need a clear theoretical response, and its dissemination, if the “theology” of capital is to be shattered. The renaissance of Marxist theory, to which Internationalist Perspective is committed, the analysis of the actual historical trajectory of capitalism in the present period, one unshackled from the dogmas of traditional Marxism, is one element of any challenge to the modes of subjectivation of the collective

worker that capitalist social relations have generated.



The modern world of work

No flight backwards

40. Within this same communization milieu, there have also been tendencies to confuse the *immediacy* of communism with a vision of its *instantaneity*,⁸ to which must also be added a tendency to claim that communism will not know *production*. Thus, some communizers (*Théorie Communiste*, for example) have insisted on a distinction between “production” and “infinite human activity,” with the latter never taking the form of “... ‘products,’ for that would raise the question of their appropriation or their transfer under some given mode.”⁹ Is it possible to envisage human existence without some mode for the production of “things” and their distribution? The “Friends of the Classless Society” have seen here “a steady drift towards mysticism, ultimately driven by

⁸ Bruno Astarian, within the communization tendency, has pointed to that confusion in his “Communization as a Way Out of the Crisis,” p. 1, on libcom.org.

⁹ “Self-organisation is the first act of revolution; it then becomes an obstacle which the revolution has to overcome,” p.39. This text from *Théorie Communiste* can be found on libcom.org. This is not the place for a detailed examination of the rich content of the discussions within the communization milieu, a task to which IP shall return.

fear of the concept of production”¹⁰ The identification of *production* with labor and capitalism, and the objection to the materialization of human activity in “products,” seems specious to us. Is a house, clothes, food, clean water, all products, all necessary to human existence, to be rejected in the name of a vague concept of “infinite human activity”? Such a view smacks of the equation of objectivation with alienation. But all human activity, all *praxis*, all *techné*, all *poïesis*, yields objectivations, the “products” of action in which a material or social form is given to one’s human powers of expression. So too, will communist human activity produce objectivations, but those objectivations will not be subsumed by the value-form or subjected to labor-time accounting. It is on that basis that Marx’s “social individual” can and will emerge and flourish.

41. Beyond that philosophical issue, however, the “landscape,” physical and human, that a communist revolution will confront will demand an enormous activity of production, born of the need to repair the destructive effects of the social retrogression and ecological destruction wrought by capital. Capital has created a science and technology yoked to the value-form. Its global spread is fast creating a planet of slums. Vast components of the collective worker have become permanently superfluous, expelled from the site of production, their standard of living rapidly declining. To overcome the effects of that social and material devastation, and to assure a decent life for the world’s population, humankind will have to engage in the production that such an undertaking entails. And that communist production will need to take place globally, its spread across the world being a primary goal. That production cannot simply be local; indeed it will require *organization*, just as the sites of production in each locale will, and the decisions regarding the work to be done will need to be organized by the collective worker. Here the distinction between *production* and *productivity* becomes crucial. Production is inseparable from human action, though its different modes and social forms are historically specific. Productivity, in a capitalist society, is a standard for measuring the *speed*

¹⁰ “On Communization and Its Theorists”, *Kosmoprolet*, 3, Fall 2011.

with which production is accomplished. It is this capitalist productivity, with its basis in the extraction of surplus-value from the collective worker, and the real subsumption of labor to capital and the “clock” of socially necessary labor-time, that must be immediately abolished, not the production of the very things without which humankind can neither exist nor survive, or the objectifications that satisfy its communal, intellectual, and creative needs. Capital as a moving contradiction, its very transformation from a mode of production based on the *formal* domination of capital to one increasingly based on the *real* domination of capital, articulated in the first two parts of this text, has been predicated on the project of always producing more value in a given period of time by the development of new technologies; increasingly relying on the extraction of *relative* surplus-value as opposed to a reliance on the extraction of *absolute* surplus-value. The real domination of capital depends on increasing the *productivity* of labor. And that entails a constant effort to reduce the *time* of both production and circulation of commodities. One facet of that effort, as Marx pointed out, is capital’s drive to overcome every spatial barrier or limit: “Thus the creation of the physical conditions of exchange – of the means of communication and transport – the *annihilation of space by time* – becomes an extraordinary *necessity* for it.”¹¹ Capitalist productivity, then, has as its sole aim to increase surplus labor; surplus labor time.

By contrast, communism is predicated on the creation of *disposable time* for every human being, the creation of “not-labor time” the prospect of which the very trajectory of capitalism has made an objective-real possibility. In contrast to capitalism, where the human being is subsumed under labor, where “[t]he most developed machinery thus forces the worker to work longer than the savage does, or than he himself did with the simplest, crudest tools,”¹² and where the development of

the productive forces is yoked to the insatiable drive to valorize value, in communism the creation of disposable time means the “... the development of the individual’s full productive forces,”¹³ the all-around development of the human being and his/her capacity for life in all its dimensions. Yet communism is not a flight backwards to primitive means of production or conditions of work, let alone a Woodstockian vision of paradise. Nor will communism ignore the need for an “economy of time” The time of productivity as it has historically developed in capitalism is *capital-time*, a concept of time linked to capitalist social relations of production. Communism, as Marx pointed out in one of his few explicit discussions of what he termed a future “communal production,” by contrast, will know a different concept of time, though its determination will remain essential: “The less time the society requires to produce wheat, cattle, etc., the more time it wins for other production, material or mental. Just as in the case of an individual, the multiplicity of its development, its enjoyment and its activity depends on an economization of time.”¹⁴

Where exchange and the market make production *social* under capitalism, production and work will become *directly* social in communism, and the collective worker will need to fashion and create the actual structures and organs through which decisions will be made. And here, past history, even the history of the revolutionary wave that began in 1917 – given the vast changes in the landscape of capitalism – provides us with no guaranteed blueprint.

42. The abolition of the value-form is the immediate task of the revolution, *not* the culmination of a period of transition as the historical communist left had maintained. What must be immediately abolished, then, is the reduction of human activity to abstract labor, the *social* substance of value, and its measurement by socially necessary labor-time, which is the historically specific social form in which labor exists in capitalist society. That also entails the abolition of a mode of the distribution of goods through labor-time accounting. Where shortages exist, as one would expect in a planet devastated by capitalism and its exactions (wars, the

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin Books, p. 524. With the incorporation of the whole globe into a single capitalist system, attendant on the development of the computer and the world-wide web, we now live with the full impact of that annihilation of space by time.

¹² *Ibid.* pp. 708-709. The micro-computer, cell phone, and hand-held device, all connect the worker to his job twenty-four hours a day.

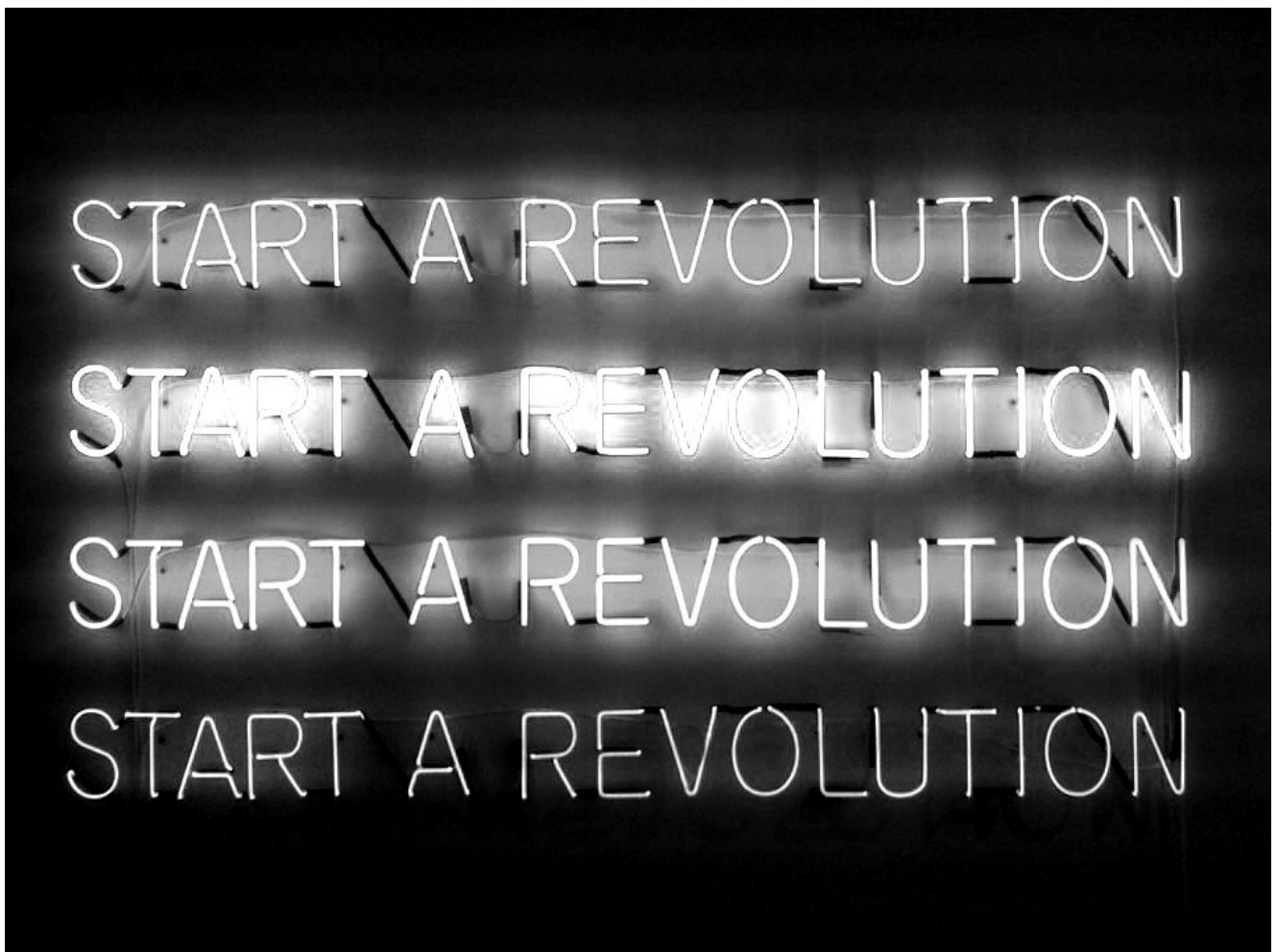
¹³ *Ibid.* p. 708.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 172-173.

marginalization of masses of human beings, ecological catastrophes), the rationing of scarce goods on an equitable basis, taking into account need, would be an alternative more in keeping with the goal of communism than a mode of distribution based on labor-time accounting. The revolution must also entail the self-abolition of the proletariat, a class inseparable from wage-labor and the commodity form, not its enshrinement as a purported ruling class, and the universalization of its condition. It is, then, in the very course of the revolutionary upheaval that communism occurs.

Communism is not some utopian project disconnected from the actual contradictions of capitalism and its inability to provide the material conditions for the reproduction of

humankind. The ability of the collective worker to overthrow capitalism and its social relations of production is directly linked to the very structuration of capital, and to the social retrogression that it has produced. The impossibility for capital to reproduce the proletarian condition as it had historically developed, the massive and *permanent* expulsion of proletarian labor from the economy, even as capitalism spreads to every corner of the globe, the creation of a vast planet of slums in both the 'first' and the 'third' worlds, and the rapidly expanding ecological catastrophes directly linked to the reign of capital, are all due to the continued existence of the value-form. It is those very real historical and *material* conditions that have made communism the immediate task of revolution today.



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.

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

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

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

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