

Internationalist Perspective - The World As We See It:

Reference Points

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. Capitalism is Destroying our World

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

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

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

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

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

We live in an age of crisis: A crisis of humankind's relation to nature; a crisis of social reproduction of an ever larger part of the world's population; an economic crisis; a financial crisis; a crisis of mental health; an existential crisis and so on.... Their causes seem complex and diverse and indeed they are, but they all

take place against a common background of capitalism's conquest of the world. Capitalism has penetrated, developed and unified human society⁴ in its entirety. In doing so, it has created a world in which it no longer fits. As a result, the contradiction between human needs and the needs of capital becomes ever starker. This is what fuels and unifies all these different forms of crisis.

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

2. What is Capitalism?

Historically, capitalism appears as a specific form of social organization, a system that uniquely maintains itself only on the basis of its relentless economic expansion. Of course, all social forms must reproduce themselves, but only capitalism posits itself in and by its own economic growth. In other social formations, production is at the service of social life. In capitalism, on the contrary, social life is entirely at the service of production and profits are its sole objective. The consequence of this imperative towards expansion has resulted in the monetization of all aspect of life as well as the monetization of all of the resources of the natural environment. In the end, everything will have its price. This quantification of life via the cash-nexus has eroded the most essential human bonds that form the basis of the human community. At times, this erosion occurs gradually and even imperceptibly; at other times, violently as it did through colonization or the current transformation of the earth into a global factory. The ideologues of capitalism would have us believe that capitalism is the outcome of "man's natural tendency to truck and barter" to his personal advantage as Adam Smith famously wrote; it is simply the social expression of human nature. But the history of capitalism tells us a very different story. From its inception, to all that we see before us today, capitalism is a story written in blood and filth. This story includes: the forcible privatization of communal land (enclosures), forced labor via laws against vagabondage (homelessness), colonization, the slave trade, child labor, militarized economic trade zones, forcible opening and closing of markets, and endless wars of economic competition; all of this directly attributable to the expansive needs of capitalism. The ideologues would also have us believe that capitalism is a stable system described as a dynamic equilibrium that continually innovates to improve the lives of the multitude. At times capitalism has the appearance of stability in its heartlands, but, at its expansive edge, capitalism always displays a savagery that exceeds the imagination. As capitalism competes within itself to accelerate the imperative to produce--entering a phase that today we could call "hyper-industrialization"⁵-- it simultaneously leaves behind, even in its heartlands, a colossal waste of human and material resources. Detroit is but one example of these modern

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

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

wastelands. As it produces spectacular wealth at greater speeds, capitalism produces even faster a degrading and grinding poverty globally that has spawned the largest human migration in modern times.

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

In the most basic terms, capitalism is a result of a unique convergence between 1) an abundant source of "free" labor, 2) an accumulation of capital in its money form and 3) the appearance of a state apparatus capable of regulating a new productive/distributive regime. "Free" labor in this case means *proletarianized* labor or a mass of workers who possess no means of their own to autonomously reproduce their lives and are thus compelled to sell their labor-power as a unit of time for a wage offered by a capitalist. Laborers are also "free" in the sense that they can choose to sell their labor power to the highest bidder or not sell it at all; quite unlike pre-capitalist systems where labor was a political, social or even spiritual obligation. In pre-capitalist forms of society, the surplus wealth created by labor was directly and visibly expropriated from the worker/peasant. Capitalism, however, posited a new form of expropriation by burying it deep within the production process itself rather than in the sphere of circulation where it is seen by all. This new economic relationship absolved the capitalist of all social, political and spiritual obligations to society. In fact, the exchange between the worker and capitalist --labor-time for a wage--appears to be an equal exchange entered into without social or political coercion. Workers agree that their labor-time is worth the wages offered and thus all reciprocal obligations are fully met at the end of the workday. This, at least, is the appearance.

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

Capitalism appears then as a vast web of exchanges where all goods circulate via the infinite flow of money. On the surface, money appears to be the ultimate guarantor of freedom and equality. In the

realm of circulation, the point at which goods are distributed, everyone is equal, without special privilege, governed by a total social symmetry. The dollar of the housemaid has the same value as the dollar in the pocket of the oil baron. Each is equally free to dispose of that dollar accordingly. Indeed, this is ultimately the meaning of freedom and equality within the context of capitalism and the source of the extraordinary power capital has over its subjects. However, in the realm of production there exists an asymmetrical relationship of power between buyer and seller, an *un*-freedom that does not directly appear in the exchange. The fact that labor is exchanged for money means essentially that inequality and coercion hide behind the facade of equality and free exchange. And this is indeed the historic role of the state in capitalism, to guarantee the permanent asymmetry between labor and capital, to guarantee that labor is always the subject of compulsion, i.e., need. This is the history of the entire legal and political system and the “bloody legislation” imposed on society by the capitalist state. The state is not now and never has been a vehicle for human liberation; its most essential function, beyond its military requisite, is to maintain the stability of the currency, to guarantee the sanctity of the exchange contract and to ensure the adequate supply of cheap labor. That is to say that the state, in all its modern forms, is the political expression of capitalism. Any definition of capitalism that does not incorporate the state as a necessary element of its definition will never grasp the mode of domination created by capitalism.

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

3. The Historical Trajectory of Capitalism

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

The specific confluence of socio-economic processes that led to the development of industrial capitalism in England in the 17th and 18th centuries was predicated on the separation of the landed laborer from the means of production and subsistence, a process that entailed the legal freedom of the direct producer, a result of often violent class struggles, which constituted the bases for the appropriation of surplus labor by *economic* and non-coercive legal means; by *market* forces and the development of *waged-labor*, and the formation of a *proletarian* class. Those developments set in motion over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries a mass movement to the new centers of industry inside England

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

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

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

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

The incentive is surplus-profit (extra surplus-value). Commodities are exchanged on the base of their social value. That is, the (past and living) labor time that is consumed in their production under average social conditions. New technology which reduces that labor time below average, which lowers the

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

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

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

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

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

The conquest was not only outwards but inwards as well. The value-form and the social relations that instantiate it invades every "pore" of civil society, of socio-cultural and political existence, subjecting them to its imperatives. Not just the production and circulation of commodities, but *science* and *technology* too, upon which it increasingly depends, so central to the directional logic of capitalism, are now subject to the imperatives of the value-form itself. It is here that the role of commodity *fetishism*, not simply as ideology, but as the way in which, under capitalism, social relations between persons are constructed and subjectively experienced as relations between commodities, between things, becomes such a formidable obstacle to the development of consciousness. It is as relations between things that social relations between human beings *appear* in capitalist society. This renders those social relations opaque and seemingly autonomous from their bases in the very activity of production and reproduction undertaken by the proletariat itself. The objectivity of value is neither *material* (physiological) nor metaphysical for Marx; it is purely *social*. It is an historically developed social relation produced and re-

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

produced by the actions of human beings, by proletarians. Commodity *fetishism* obscures, distorts, “hides,” the actual social relations that are congealed in the commodity, and seemingly turns them into a *natural* feature of the commodity itself. This fetishism is not simply a false consciousness imposed by the ruling class; it is also results from the actual lived reality of the proletariat. The very structures of the *social being* of proletarian existence itself generate its reified consciousness, and thereby its subjugation by the value-form. If in one sense, as Adorno pointed out, the value-form is an “illusion,” it is in terms of social being “... the most real thing of all, the magic formula that has bewitched the world.”⁸ The task of pro-revolutionaries is to expose and explode the commodity fetish in all its dimensions.

Real domination caused a vertiginous development of capitalist society, but it also developed its inherent contradictions. Capital, wealth, can take no other form than that of the commodity, exchangeable for other commodities. That means it must have a use-value (for somebody with money to buy it) and an exchange value, the content of which is abstract labor time, value. It cannot exist without either: if it has no use-value, it can't be sold, and if its production requires no labor time, none can be stolen, so there can be no surplus value or profit. Use value and value, the two sides of the commodity, must therefore develop hand in hand. But under real domination, they become increasingly unhinged. Use-values grow exponentially through technification, a process in which living labor is subtracted, replaced by technology. But the growth of value requires that living labor-power is added. Capitalist society runs more and more on past labor (hardware and software). The pool of living labor, from which surplus value can be extracted, tendentially shrinks, despite the increasingly efficient fishing techniques. Tendentially, this leads to a relative decline of the *production* of new value while the exponential growth of use-values (of the capacity to produce them) clashes with the narrow basis on which the conditions of consumption in capitalism rest, and impedes the *realization* of value.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Another World is Possible

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

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

Some workers have permanent jobs, others work part-time or do temp-jobs, free-lance or for an agency. Some work in high tech, others in the ‘informal economy’ of the slums. More and more have precarious jobs or are unemployed, excluded from the production process yet still dependent on it. Some perform manual labor, others, a growing part of the working class, handle information (the *cognitariat*). But, regardless of those differences and of the discrepancies in income and working conditions, the working class is unified in its separation from the means of its own reproduction, which are owned by capital and used for its accumulation. Therefore, there is a fundamental antagonism between the capitalist class and the working class. It exists not only during periods of open class struggle (strikes, demonstrations,

¹⁰ Marx, “Results...”, op.cit., p.990

blockades, occupations, riots, etc.), but also in the daily reality of exploitation, the extraction of surplus value from the working class.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Objectively, the working class is more unified than it ever was. By this, we mean that the production process has become more socialized, more global and interdependent than ever. Production is less the

sum of the efforts of individual workers than a collective, collaborative application of social knowledge. The working class became, as Marx put it, the *Gesamtarbeiter*, the collective worker.¹¹

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

It is because the collective worker produces both the value that capitalism depends upon for its survival, and the social wealth that society depends upon for its survival, that it has the capacity to free society from its dependency on capitalism, on value.

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

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

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

Consider this. If our analysis is right, the crisis of capitalism will deepen in the years to come. The attacks on the working class will accelerate. They will meet resistance. Workers cannot defend themselves individually. They need to join together in order to gain critical weight, so unification of struggles will be pursued, the more the attacks of capital are aimed at ever-more victims. Of course those struggles will be recuperated many times. But the sheer size of the resistance may move the goal-posts. Together with a growing awareness of class power, an awareness of what's possible can grow. Meanwhile, direct

¹¹ Marx, "Results ..." *ibid.*, p. 1040

attacks on the value-form will spread. Riots and looting but also occupation of housing and public spaces, free clinics and other production for needs instead of money, free exchange of digital goods...

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

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

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

The collective worker stands before a double, seemingly contradictory, task: on the one hand, it has to unify on a class basis, become the collective worker subjectively as well objectively, in order to gain the power to overthrow capitalism. On the other hand, it also has to abolish itself. A revolution that ends capitalism is a revolution that ends wage-labor, and ends the rule of labor-time. That is the root. Its eradication is not a future result of the revolution, it is the revolution itself.

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

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

5. But it is not Inevitable

If pro-revolutionaries appear to be continually talking about the crisis of capitalism, it is because capitalism is not only a system *in* crisis, but also a system *of* crisis. Crises are a part of its normal, cyclical development. As Marx stressed, a crisis is not only a manifestation of the fact that the valorization of

capital has run into obstacles, but it is also a (temporary) solution to this problem, by causing the devalorization of existing capital (including variable capital, the workers) and thus lowering production costs, thereby laying the ground for a new period of growth. The duration of the latter may vary but it always ends in crisis again. The duration and depth of the crises vary too. The capitalist class has become clever in postponing and containing crises, through financial, fiscal and other policies, but that only results in a deeper crisis later on, which demands more devalorization, more destruction, more violence and hunger, so that value can grow again.

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

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

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

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

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

This is not the view of Internationalist Perspective. While IP maintains that communism, the creation of a human community, is the hope of the human race, IP rejects the idea that the outcome is assured, determined by the purported *laws* of history.

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

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

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

6. The State can never be ours

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

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

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

In most pre-capitalist social formations, production, distribution and consumption formed part of an organic whole; in addition, the social hierarchies in such societies were formed within a unity of the political, social and economic relations. One's political position at the time was usually commensurate with one's economic position. Capitalism, however, began a long process of dissolving these unities, "liberating" them so to speak, and re-establishing them in a competitive market environment enabled and mediated by the money-form of value. But such dissociating of the former unity was dangerously unsustainable in and of itself as it activated powerful antagonistic forces that could threaten social existence. It was then, in the formation of an autonomous political realm, that the modern state was able to form the institutions that advanced the interests of capital while containing and regulating its centrifugal tendencies. The citizens of the 'free-state,' Marx observed, lead a double life. In their real lives in civil society, i.e. economic society, they feel themselves isolated and at war with everyone else in the defense of their private interests. And in their imaginary lives as citizens of the state they are integrated into and at one with the world in theory but not in practice. The separation between the political and the economic was and is an essential component that enables the tendential logic of capital to unfold according to the imperative of value-formation. The state does not inscribe in law directly the mode of production. This appears as the mystical sub-stratum of social existence. But the autonomy of the economy is guaranteed by the state precisely by making the mode of production untouchable.

At the subjective level, the sovereign rights-bearing citizen of the democratic state has a close relationship to the sovereign consumer in the free market, and it is the state's function to protect this relationship. At the social level, all of the institutional organizations of the modern state serve essentially to ensure the continual accumulation of capital in realms of *production*, *circulation* and the supply of *free-labor*. In the realm of *production*, the state guarantees a money supply along with a stable banking and credit system, it protects native capital from competition through tariffs and trade agreements, it supports a legal system that insures the sanctity of the contracts between sovereign parties, it invests in research and development for future production via military research, university funding and grants to private research institutions, and it regulates access to natural resources. In the realm of *circulation*, the state provides an infrastructure contoured to the precise needs of capital accumulation, it seeks to expand markets internationally through direct military intervention, through financial tools and trade policy and it encourages consumption through credit regulation etc. Finally, and most essentially, it guarantees an adequate supply of *free-labor* by ensuring that the supply always exceeds the demand to secure capital's domination over labor. This is done through numerous long-term and short-term strategies like changes in immigration policies, birth-control regulations, opening pathways to offshore production, labor-laws that regulate wages, pensions, benefits etc. But, beyond the supply of labor, the state's role in *disciplining labor* is critical, and here we see capital's gradual penetration into the social body and the absorption of the collective worker into the mechanism of production via the vast network of educational institutions, prisons, medical institutions, along with the

vast network of policing and 24/7 surveillance. This control also includes drug policies, housing policies, welfare access and the control of information.

When seen in this light, all of the institutional forms of the modern state respond to the needs of capital accumulation through both economic and extra-economic means. The fundamental purpose of every state institution is to modulate social life for the benefit of capital. We might compare any single institution of the state to the accelerator of an automobile. An accelerator can increase the rate of acceleration or it can decrease it, but it cannot change its function in relation to the car, nor can it alter the purpose of the car. Labor law can increase the minimum wage or it can decrease it, but it cannot eliminate labor. It serves to only temporarily affect the rate of surplus-value extraction via the wage. Any short-term victory via the state—through its laws and institutions—in the end will be a Pyrrhic victory in that the belief required in the institutions further *subjectivates*¹² the proletariat to a form of capital accumulation. Every movement that seeks reform through state institutions embeds the proletariat deeper into the machinery of the state. If it is unable to free itself from the pathways already laid out before it by the state and its institutions, the proletariat will fail to activate its own capacities for creative self-organization.

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

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

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

Stalin, that dictatorship *over* the proletariat; that historically specific path to a state capitalist form of extraction of surplus-value from the proletariat and capital accumulation, constitutes not the triumph of the proletariat, but the triumph of counter-revolution. Indeed, even in the form of a state based on the dictatorship of the *worker's councils*, with delegates elected and *revocable* by the workers who democratically elected them, the result would *not* be communization so long as the workers are subjected to labor-time accounting and the value-form.

7. Real wealth versus Value

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

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

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

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

grows, because the value that is produced and realized grows; it feeds on it. It can't grow on its own. Therefore a crisis of profit in industry and commerce leads to a devalorization of the hoard, of possessions in general.

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

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

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

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

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

8: The End of Labor

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

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

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

The later Marx's most detailed statement on communism can be found in his “Critique of the Gotha Programme” (1875), in which he outlined his conception of a lower and higher stage of communism. For Marx, in the lower stage of communism, “just as it emerges from capitalist society” -- still stamped by its social forms -- “the individual producer gets back from society ... exactly what he has given to it [by his labor].”¹⁵ As Marx acknowledged, “Clearly, the same principle is at work here as that which regulates

¹³ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p.52. In a critique of the German economist Friedrich List, the young Marx said “‘Labour’ by its very nature is un-free, un-human, un-social activity, determined by private property and creating private property. Hence the abolition of private property will become a reality only when it is conceived as the abolition of ‘labour’....” “Draft of an Article on Friedrich List's Book *Das nationale System der politischen Oekonomie*” in Marx and Engels *Collected Works*, vol 4 (New York: International Publishers, 1965), pp.278-279).

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

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

the exchange of commodities as far as this is an exchange of equal values.” Again, as Marx recognized “... a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for the same amount in another.”¹⁶ For Marx, then, the value-form would still preside over both production and distribution in the lower stage of communism, however different its political institutions might be (e.g. a proletarian or workers state). Workers would receive only the value that their direct labor produced. And most significantly, the worker would be in thrall, subject, to the *clock*. Labor *time* would still determine the worker’s share of the social wealth – and with it the prospect that the state might focus on the expansion of surplus labor even to the detriment of necessary labor (that labor necessary to the reproduction – social and physical -- of the workers themselves). For the Marx of the “Critique of the Gotha Programme”, then, it would only be in its higher stage that the human species could “... cross the narrow horizon of bourgeois right and inscribe on its banner: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!”¹⁷ Until then, the value-form, and its “logic” would continue to preside over human existence.

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

Communization is *not* the outcome of a period of transition, at the end of which communism can then be established. The very revolutionary *process* itself entails the abolition of labor and of labor-time accounting. Even in the midst of revolutionary upheavals, where scarcity and hunger may well prevail, modes of rationing based on an equitable distribution of goods according to *need* would be preferable

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 347.

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

to a mode of distribution based on labor-time, which would institutionalize the value-form and its imperatives. Only on that basis can the horrors of capitalism be safely placed in the trash can of history.

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

9: For a Renaissance of Marxism

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

Marx’s body of work – social reality within the evolution of the capitalist socio-economic system, seen from the point of view of the proletariat – was and is under a continuing process of development. Marx began his revolutionary life with a critique of philosophy and developed no philosophical system of his own; this would have been meaningless to him. His focus moved with the circumstances of historico-social developments: the 1848 upheavals across Europe, the American Civil War, the 1870 Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune being the most significant. His most systematic work – his critique of bourgeois political economy – has left us with an important legacy especially in its illumination of the specific nature of capitalist exploitation, capital’s ravenous hunger for expanded reproduction and the roots of its economic crises. Despite the enormity of this aspect of his work, this “economic shit” as he described it, is only a part of his contribution.

Those who came after him took up and developed aspects of his work. All that followed along his pathways suffered to a greater or lesser extent from the fact that much of his writings were unknown and unpublished; this is still the case. Interpretations of what was extant were colored by incompleteness and by the interests of the interpreters who were of various philosophical schools and who adopted different stances with respect to world events, to the institutions supporting the real domination of capital and most importantly to the struggles of the proletariat. In their hands, “Marxism” divided into a multitude of theoretical and ideological tributaries. Marx cannot be held accountable for what others developed out of his writings after his death.

Nonetheless, Marx was responsible for his theories and the actions they guided during his lifetime. Thus, his early deterministic and stage-ist theories led him to congratulate Lincoln on his re-election even

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

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

Marx has provided us with the essential critical weapon useable to develop a revolutionary theory fit for the circumstances of today's 21st Century world, despite the fact that he did not live through the 20th Century to see the *actual* historical trajectory of a century and more of the real domination of capital, to see the hell it has created for humanity: the orgies of warfare and the threat of annihilation, the astounding levels of exploitation and a revolutionary subject which has gone through such changes as to make it unrecognizable to the 19th Century eye. In this time there has been only one proletarian revolutionary wave – and that did not occur under the conditions that Marx had envisaged. Although there is much value to be gained in retracing his footsteps through the 19th Century theoretical territory he inhabited, there is much more value to be obtained viewing the development of his work from our 21st Century vantage point.

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

Marx's insights offer the only way forward to answer the big question – but it will only be successful if we develop a revitalized Marxian approach which aims to illuminate the interaction between the nature of the revolutionary subject and the dynamics of capitalism; a Marxian approach that can explain both

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

the prospects for the self-activity of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject, as well as the formidable obstacles it confronts in the commodity fetishism and the value-form to which it is subjected by capitalist social relations. That's why we need a *renaissance* of Marxism.

In his later years Marx was concerned to master the new findings in the anthropological studies that were greatly expanding in the late 19th Century and which cast more light on social dynamics in different cultures, evidently believing that they could contribute to further develop his revolutionary theory. In his introduction to *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*, Lawrence Krader concludes by saying: "Regarding the future of society, and the lessons to be learned from the past, we get no guidance save that which we can work out for ourselves." Although Krader's comments were directed towards one aspect of Marx's work, they could well be addressed to the corpus as a whole, containing as they do a leitmotif for a renaissance of Marxism: "We get no guidance save that which we can work out for ourselves."

10. For Political Organization

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

In the past ...

Marxists of different kinds have advocated different models of organization. The term "proletarian political organization" inevitably evokes the social democratic parties and trade unions which in the 19th century organized and educated the working class, and directed the struggle for reforms for a shorter working day, limiting the work of children and women, etc. The party was a place where the working class was organized, unified and became aware of its identity. While this was possible when capitalism had only a formal grip on society under its real domination when it penetrates all the pores of society and absorbs all institutions into the fabric of its market, this model is clearly obsolete. Mass parties and trade unions have become integral parts of the functioning of capitalism. When push comes to shove, they always defend the national capital, its competitive position, its need to valorize, its need to wage war.

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

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

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

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

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

And today?

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

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

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

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

"Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."
(Theses on Feuerbach) Marx's oft-quoted remark did not mean that philosophy was complete and workers must now simply apply it to change the world. It meant that theory is not an end in itself, that it is pointless if not tied to action that challenges the capitalist world. Theory must be where the struggle is. Therefore, the political organization must aim to participate actively in the struggles of the collective worker. 'Participate' rather than 'intervene': instead of making one-sided interventions, we seek to participate in the conversation of resistance, in which theory inspires and develops action, and is, in its turn, inspired and developed by action.

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

It is to this struggle that IP is committed.