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Communization As a Way Out of the Crisis

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Conclusion

The abolition of value, the destruction of capital and the self-suppression of the proletariat seem to be mysterious or mystical events only if they are contemplated from the perspective of an insurrectionary process like that of the old workers movement, which affirmed the “hard working” identity of the working class and which conceived the goal of the seizure of political power by the proletariat (in reality, by its representatives). Until now the communists have confronted these problems without being able to solve them, and they have found no other solution than to marshal the argument of the necessity for a “transitional society” as a dodge. The transitional society is an illusion, just like the gradual extinction of the State.

Starting with the crisis of the 1960s and 1970s, the process facing the social classes has begun to clarify this problem for us. Recent developments in class relations have even facilitated our attaining a better understanding of the profound nature of capitalist society, of value, of labor, and therefore of their abolition, than Marx himself. This allows us to anticipate, from a closer vantage point, what communism will look like as well as the revolutionary process of communization that will bring it about.

The more profound the crisis, the more progress we will have made in this direction.

of the proletarians (parents and children) who are involved in its implementation. Despite our difficulty in imagining a life without labor or value, analysis (and certain experiences of response to the crisis) will allow us to state that once the crisis reaches a certain degree of development, the communizing solution will be more likely to improve the quality of life than any self-management formula. And what we have said here about the schools applies to all the other institutions as well.

3.2. Reject All Militarization

If such a local movement spreads like wildfire, if self-management is not enough to stop it, then it will, obviously, be subjected to the most violent repression. History shows us that property does not hesitate before the prospect of conducting any kind of massacre. Nonetheless, I believe that one would demonstrate a serious lack of understanding of the specific victories of the proletariat if one were to advocate the militarization, even if it is qualified as “revolutionary”, of the movement. History does not offer us even one example where militarization, even the most flexible and democratic militarization, did not throw the doors wide open to the counterrevolution. It is not possible here to go into details, but we can nonetheless point out that, if the crisis reaches such a degree of intensity that it causes communization to become widespread, the bourgeoisie will itself be affected by the movement and however relatively privileged the personnel of its repressive apparatus may be, they will not be immune to the effects of the crisis, either. This is not to say that the police will morally succumb to the power of the revolutionary ideal, but they may very well be driven to mutiny for quite material reasons (as in South Africa). Therefore, the rejection of any hint of militarization by no means implies a rejection of violence in general.

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3. Revolution, Counterrevolution, Repression

Communization will advance by progressively extending the scope of the expropriations. Property will not, of course, allow this to happen without offering any resistance. It will try to tighten the various cords that bind us to it. The counterrevolution is not just a military affair.

3.1. The Subtleties of the Counterrevolution

A certain proportion of the opposition to communization will come from the ranks of the proletariat itself. In any given situation, it is possible that there will be a confrontation over whether to opt for self-management or communization. For example, problems relating to childcare during the crisis period will certainly lead to attempts to subject schools to self-management. In opposition to this, a communizing current will propose the pure and simple abolition of schools—while, in the meantime, most likely, the students will venture to express their opinions directly and violently (as in Greece). Obviously, the abolition of the schools immediately poses a mountain of pressing problems: who will take care of the children? What will they be taught? Should special facilities be dedicated to their teaching? Would it not be better for them to be instructed in the boulevards of the revolution? Like every problem associated with the revolution, it will only exist as a local problem to be solved by the inhabitants of the neighborhood (no ministry of education!). The solution that will be implemented locally, with more or less success, will not require heroic feats of productivity (no building schools, no training teachers, no designing curricula), and will be subject to correction depending on the changing situation. The success or failure of such an initiative will not be judged by the standard of its theoretical precision, but by whether or not it is capable of improving the lives

world, the distribution of free, or low-price, goods, provokes hoarding and over-consumption. In communism this fear of scarcity will disappear together with property. Each person will be assured of being able to get food, for free, which others have provided and which others have prepared. In these conditions, why would one want to over-consume and hoard food in one's pantry just because it is free? Everything will be free and will always be free. Because everything will be produced by people for whom, in a way, the sausages will only be the byproduct of several days of discussions concerning the meaning of life.

Free distribution is a notion that is hard to accept. It seems to me that, in order to speak of communism, it is better to understand free distribution in the sense of "free expressions" rather than that of "free products". On the one hand, it is obvious that communizing initiatives will impose the principle of free distribution within their arenas of action. Furthermore, and more importantly, this free distribution means more than "price = zero", and it is not necessary to think of this as the free distribution of commodities that can be obtained without money. What is at stake here is the unpaid activity of the communizers. On the other hand, it is obvious that the proletarians who will engage in communization will do so only after having vainly attempted to obtain a wage or some form of compensation for their activity. Free distribution, in communism, is the principle of existence for its own sake, in a totally comprehensive activity that breaks with all separations; that between "production" and "consumption", for example.

Production without productivity, consumption without necessity ... these are two expressions which, in the limited vocabulary at our disposal, indicate a single unified and free activity.

1. The Immediacy of Communism

1.1. Definition and Origin

We must not confuse immediacy with instantaneity. When we say immediacy of communism, we are saying that the goal of the proletarian revolution no longer consists in creating a transitional society, but in directly establishing communism. That is: something that is more complicated than conquering political power, making alliances with other social layers, and proceeding with a transitional stage on this terrain (the gradual extinction of the State, etc.).

The notion of the immediacy of communism did not appear from out of thin air. It appeared with the crisis of the 1960s and 1970s, as a result of the political impotence of the left and the leftists' inability to understand the rejection of work. Today, all programmatic attempts appear ridiculous. As for the anti-work impulse, it is stronger today than it was in the 1970s (in China, Bangladesh, and even the highly industrialized countries).

1.2. Communization as Process

Communization does not mean that communism will be established by waving a magic wand. It will be established through a process of struggle, with advances and retreats by the revolution. What it means is that the actions undertaken by the revolutionaries will aim at the abolition of work and of value, and of all the rest (family, fatherland), *here and now*. When the revolution attacks capitalist property, it does not do so in order to vest the proletariat with the ownership of the property that it did not previously own, but in order to put an end to all forms of property, immediately. At present, this process cannot possibly be described in detail. It is however necessary to characterize it more precisely in order to get a better idea of what lies in store for us and to be able to distinguish, when the time comes, between revolution and counterrevolution.

2. Responses to the Crisis and Communization

When the crisis breaks out, the proletariat rebels because its labor power is not being purchased, which excludes it from social relations and from all its connections to nature. By rebelling, the proletarians mount a response to the crisis, a response that in and of itself constitutes the matrix of all possibilities, and is the only place from which communism can arise. While theory does not always define communism the same way, all its definitions and strategies have been based on what the proletariat does when it responds to the crisis. We can only speak of a response to the crisis, however, in the case of a generalized uprising of the proletariat, but not in the case of a conflict isolated to one or several enterprises, however “exemplary” the conflicts may otherwise be.

The response to the crisis hinges on two essential factors: the individualization/de-massification of the proletariat, and the expropriation of capitalist property to provide for the needs of the struggle—not to return to work without the bosses. If the current crisis becomes so acute that it provokes a large-scale proletarian insurrection, we shall once again meet with those two factors, marked by the historical features of our epoch. The de-massification of the proletariat will be all the more clear since this is a process that was already begun by post-Fordist capital. To want to return to the good old days of the mass worker is a counterrevolutionary dream. As for capitalist property, it has two characteristics:

- On the one hand, nothing escapes its domain. Capital has seized all of life to the point where, whatever you do, you are always on its property. When the crisis breaks out, the proletariat has no choice but to invade capitalist property. Even the simplest demonstration forces it to occupy the municipal asphalt. Today it is allowed to do

- At least during an initial period, communization will be achieved locally, not because it will have been the work of “autarchic communauts”, but because it will consist in initiatives that are totally under the control of the participants. Communization will be a constellation of local initiatives. It is, so it seems to me, at this local level where communization can show that it immediately improves the lives of the proletarians. And this aspect is fundamental: the proletarians will carry out the revolution to live better, not from loyalty to an ideal. If we were to go into too much detail, we would end up sketching the outline of an economy that is just as constricting as that of a transitional society. At the same time, however, it is hard to resist doing so (and, in passing, demonstrating the poverty of our imaginations) in order to offer palpable evidence that all the solutions offered by the communist revolution are informed by the principle of valuing activity more than its result; that means that the most important “result” of human activity is the activity itself. Individuals will circulate between various activities according to their tastes, and each stage of this circulation will be a moment in their reproduction. Products will circulate with these individuals, but without exchange. Those who make sausages will then go to a local restaurant without bothering to obtain anything in exchange for their sausages, since these sausages will have cost them nothing, not even labor.

2.2. “Consumption” without Necessity

The reign of necessity is not where the productive forces are insufficient for assuring an abundance that cannot be precisely defined. The reign of necessity is where the existence of property imposes upon those who are not owners the permanent threat of de-socialization and death. This is why, in today’s

produce a certain number of loaves of bread, but to socialize, and to cultivate their shared affinities by producing bread.²

Furthermore, the bread that these proletarians will produce will not correspond to a general category, but will be the particular bread that someone asked them to make on this or that day. Finally, there is always the chance that the supply of flour for our bakers will be sporadic, at least at first, if the proletarians at the mill prefer to discuss the meaning of love or life instead of grinding wheat. Would this lead to chaos? We shall be told that today there will be no bread. You just have to accept it. Another alternative is that someone conceives a plan, quantified and taking time scales into account, and someone else complies with its terms. In such a case not only is value reestablished. In fact, a proletarian experience of this kind has no future: if it works the proletarians will rapidly lose their rights (restoration of wage labor in one form or another); if it does not work they will return to the old framework of unemployment and unpaid wages. It is likely, in any event, that the communizing solution will not be considered until various chess matches of this kind have tried and found wanting.

More generally, we maintain that communization will replace the circulation of goods among the “associated producers” by the circulation of individuals among diverse activities. This implies above all that:

- The “places of production” will not have permanently assigned personnel, and they will produce or not produce according to the motivation and the number of required contributors. The reason for this is that the “places of production” will be primarily places for encounters and life;

² We did notice that, at the high point of the unemployment crisis in Argentina, some of the *piqueteros* spoke more or less in the same terms. See: Bruno Astarian, “Le mouvement des *piqueteros*: Argentine 1994–2006”, in *Echanges et Mouvement*, May 2007, especially pages 37 and 52.

so. Tomorrow it will be illegal. All action undertaken by the proletariat in its response to the crisis forces it to confront capital in order to take possession of part of capital’s property and thus to confer objectivity on its own existence, which is nothing but that of the pure subject.¹ And in the current crisis capitalist property is so all embracing that now, more than ever before, the proletariat has no refuge to which it can retreat. It has its back to the wall. Capital has foreclosed, for example, all possibilities of withdrawal to the countryside;

- On the other hand, the goods that comprise capitalist property are strongly marked, in their use value, by the requirements of valorization. This is why the response to the crisis will above all seek to destroy, and to invent new uses, for things. While the possibility that the proletariat will seize control of an assembly line cannot be ruled out, one can definitely rule out its use to produce automobiles.

2.1. “Production” without Productivity and the Abolition of Value

It is on the basis of the response to the crisis, and in order to find a way out of the crisis, that communization will take shape. Communization does not respond to an ideal or a political slogan. It is the solution of the difficulties that the proletariat encounters in order to reproduce itself during the course

¹ Expropriation takes place as an interaction between individuals of the proletariat. There are no more automatic processes of class relations. If the proletariat is forced to rebel, it will nonetheless need individuals to throw the first bricks and to break the first shop windows. That is, actions undertaken during the crisis obtain a certain degree of freedom as compared to those typical of prosperity. It is still not the reign of freedom, but it is the degree of freedom that gives the insurrectionists the feeling that anything is possible.

of its activity within the context of the crisis. It is a struggle against capital to assure its own survival, nothing more. When the counterrevolutionary proletarian alternatives have demonstrated their ineffectiveness by failing to deliver the economic salvation of the proletariat, communization will bring about the leap towards the non-economy. The paradox lies in the fact that the worse the crisis gets and the more pressing the needs of the proletarians, the more imperatively will the solution consist in turning our backs on productivism. “Production” without productivity is not a productive function properly speaking. It is a form of communist socialization of men, where production certainly has a place, but without being subject to any time measurements or any other kind of measurements (income, number of operatives, productive results). According to the correct formula of *Théorie Communiste*, it means a “radical non-accountability, regardless of what is involved”.

Let us try to envisage the process as taking place in two stages:

- During the stage of descent into the hell of the crisis, the reproduction of the proletariat will be assured primarily by means of the indiscriminate seizure of goods. Even in a “just-in-time” economy, there are stocks of goods in stores and warehouses. The response to the crisis will consist (among other things) in seizing them. Already at this stage, we can imagine a divergence between a counterrevolutionary method that would attempt to inventory and centralize goods, coordinate their distribution, compel respect for the standards of rights and duties, etc.; and a communizing method, which simultaneously spurns both the economy of looting and the formation of higher bodies for distribution, even if the latter are democratically elected, etc. This second method will insist that the gravity of the crisis and absolute free

distribution are more important than the stability of the nation;

- In the second stage, that of actually leaving the crisis behind, production will resume.

The problem therefore consists in knowing how to resume production without work, without productivity or exchange.

The principle of “production” without productivity presumes that men’s activities and relations are more important than the productive result. Production can be conducted on this basis because there will no longer be “others”. In order to proceed with this production without productivity, value must be abolished in its two forms:

- Exchange value: if nothing is accounted for, if the only justification of an activity is the product that it causes to appear, then that activity has no abstract content;
- Use value: use value must be distinguished from simple utility because it possesses, in addition to its useful quality, an abstract content. In the case of the commodity its usefulness must be of a general kind, or in accordance with an average mode of use, so that it can satisfy an unknown user, whose particular needs are not taken into account (standardized mass production). Production without productivity is a particular activity carried out by particular individuals, conducted in order to satisfy certain personally expressed needs. It is the actual use of the produced objects that bears the stamp of this particularity. It is anti-standardization. The necessarily local nature of communization contributes to this.

In the communist revolution, the act of production will never be solely a productive act. If some individuals decide to construct a bakery, they will not construct it in order to