

(the) Mechanics For Disrepair

Globalization, Capitalism And Some Ideas On What To Do About It

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In all of this talk about globalization, you hear some people talking about how capitalism has always been global, and others discussing how global capital is a recent phenomena. They are both right.

Capitalism has had a global presence and been the primary global force for 100's of years, but only within the last 70 years have the people in charge of capitalism (the ruling class) come to be truly "globalized". Now the move is toward the global free-flow of capital. If we are to oppose this, and offer up solutions on what to do about it, we have to first understand what capitalism is to us. It is only from such an understanding can we begin to come up with workable solutions.

WHAT IS CAPITALISM?

Capitalism is not just an economic system, nor is it just a political system. It is both at once, and more.

(1) Class

The first thing we have to understand in order to understand capitalism is class. Class is not an economic category, as we are often led to believe. Class is determined by much more than how much money one makes.

In order to understand class, we have to first understand how we relate to the capitalist system through the work that we do. Does the work you do produce profit for someone? Do you receive only the equivalent of a small portion (if anything) of what you produce or enable to be produced? If you are a blue or white collar waged-worker, a student, an unemployed person, a homemaker, an artist, or a farmer the answer is most likely a resounding "YES!"

The second thing we have to understand in order to understand class is our power-relation to capitalism. Do you have the power to hire & fire people? Do you have the power to create and/or enforce laws, start wars, etc.? Do you have the power to impose wage-slavery? Do you own and control the means of production / reproduction? Do you have any real power over the people who do any of the above? If you are a blue or white collar waged-worker, a student, an unemployed person, a homemaker, an artist, or a farmer the answer is most likely a resounding "NO!".

Answering "yes" to the first question and "no" the second set of questions means that you are working class, a member of what is sometimes called the proletariat. It means that the majority of the fruits of your labor (whether that labor is producing and distributing commodities or reproducing the labor necessary for the production and distribution of commodities) are taken from you in exchange for a fraction (if anything) of what you deserve. It means that you have very little, if any, real social power over the capitalist system.

Opposing the working class is the ruling class. The ruling class are those who receive the majority of the fruits of our labor, those who have the power to hire and fire people, to create and/or enforce laws, start wars, etc., those who own and control the means of production / reproduction, etc. They are corporate CEOs, upper and middle management, politicians, the police forces and agencies, the WTO / IMF / World Bank / TABD / etc., all national governments, and more.

Capitalism is the struggle that rages between these two classes. The notion of middle class is invoked by the ruling class to obscure this struggle, but the middle class is a myth. There has been no middle class for a long time.

However, the working class does not now sit idly by. Through absenteeism, workplace theft, sabotage, strikes, riots, insurrections, grassroots community-building, workplace organizing and movements against sexism, racism, homophobia and the destruction of the environment, and much more, we fight the ruling class.

Capitalism does not change only in response to its own needs. While the capitalist system is changed in minor ways by the competitions of the ruling class, constant working class attacks are the source of capitalism's major changes. The ruling class has to keep reinventing capitalism in response to our attacks. Every change in government (from "democratic" republics, to fascism, to totalitarianism), every change in management forms, every war, etc. is in some way an attempt to destroy working class power. However, nothing they do can destroy the class struggle (since class is necessary to capitalism), they can only obscure the division, and momentarily weaken us.

It is important to note here that while the ruling class is aware of the class struggle, and wages it willingly, the individuals in that class do not always work well together, have ideological differences, compete with one another, and are sometimes unaware of how what they are doing effects us. As an example: black members of the ruling class from the US probably do not often knowingly perpetuate racism. By being capitalists, however, they must do so because the system is set up to maintain and strengthen cultural (and national) divides.

(2) The Market

The basis of the economic aspect of capitalism is the market. The capitalist market (like all markets) is based in exchange, whether this is in the form of exchanging two bushels of corn for a pig, or an ear of corn for \$.25 US.

The market has developed from being based on direct exchange to money-mediated exchange. Money-mediated markets have reached their consummate form in the capitalist market. The capitalist market itself has developed from local "small business" markets into national markets into international corporate markets.

It is through the market that the ruling class creates, maintains and develops its economic power. It takes the fruit of our labor (commodities) jacks the prices up well beyond what it cost them to have us make them, and sells them back to us. That is: we have to give back to them the money they gave us for doing the work just to survive, and, if we're lucky, get a little enjoyment out of our lives.

Now, a common fallacy is that we can return to small-business markets, and that in this way things would be better. This perspective misses two important points: (1) even if it were possible to turn back the clock in this way, it was from this basis that global corporate capitalism grew. Since markets must expand to survive, we would eventually be back to where we are now. And 2) those markets were also based on class division.

The market is the economic arm of capitalism, and there is no example in history of a market system that didn't involve a class structure, and the accompanying power and wealth inequalities.

(3) Money, Wages & Competition

Exchange is an alienating force. Exchange encourages us to view that which we exchange (including ourselves for wages) as an object with an exchange (and now, monetary) value. That is,

to view everything in terms of what we can get for it, instead of as something to be used and shared. This puts a distance between us and everything else, and necessarily alienates us from what we produce, what we use, from the planet, and increasingly from one another. With money, this exchange value is expressed through a mediator which alienates us even more.

Money is the economic mediator of commodity exchange, and is itself a commodity – perhaps the most sought after commodity since the more you have of it the more of everything else you can have, including power in the system, and thus over people.

Wages are what we receive in exchange for being enslaved by the system. In order to live we must rely on wages: wages from having a job, wages for being unemployed (welfare), gifts and donations from people with a waged job , etc. Those who do not rely on wages in some way are usually dead or part of the ruling class.

Wage differentials are used by the ruling class as another way of dividing us. The employed are divided from the unemployed, waged parents are divided from their unwaged children, waged spouses are divided from their unwaged spouses, etc. Wage differentials make us compete with one another.

This competition often takes the form of racism, sexism and nationalism. White vs. non-white, men vs. women, Americans vs. Mexicans, etc. It is one of the many ways the ruling class has duped us into fighting amongst ourselves, thus ignoring the real problem: capitalism, and the real enemy: the ruling class.

Interlude I: Racism, Sexism, Homophobia

So far, we have dealt with these forms of oppression as means of dividing the working class. While this is certainly the root cause of these forms of xenophobia in capitalist society , we do not say it to devalue or homogenize the varieties of exploitation and suffering people are subjected to through these oppression. Instead, we wish to encourage recognition of the common source of oppression in capitalist society (class exploitation) and suggest that there is a common solution: class solidarity to destroy capitalism.

However, no simple “unite and fight” strategy will enable this. People of color, women and queers deal with specific oppressions that can not be easily understood by white people, men and straight people since they do not share the same experiences. Thus, people of color, women and queers must often organize autonomously within the class to deal with the specifics of their exploitation. White people, men and straight folks have an obligation to respect these autonomies, and learn from their class siblings. It is only through such autonomy that true class solidarity can be built.

In addition to this, racism, sexism and homophobia / heterosexism must be confronted and destroyed by all of us, and it must start with all of us confronting our own prejudices and beginning the process of their destruction in our daily lives.

(4) The State

All class societies have a hierarchical governing structure. For the ruling aristocracy under feudalism, it was the monarchy. For the ruling class under capitalism, it is the state. The state is the collective will and voice of the capitalist ruling class. Thru the illusion of class-neutrality, it enables exploitation. The state came into being as part of the bourgeois revolutions of the 1600

& 1700s, in which the bourgeoisie (who were then the middle class) overthrew and absorbed the aristocracy, and thus became the ruling class.

The state has taken many forms. It is Republican when it is possible to quiet class struggle via the democratic illusion. It is Fascist when the ruling class must use overt violence and force to try to smash working class power. It is Totalitarian when the ruling class consolidates its entire rule in the state mechanism. However, the majority of states are some combination of these three general forms, though they usually lean toward one. Thus the US, the UK, France, etc. are more generally Republican; Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Spain under Franco, Argentina under Peron, etc. were more generally Fascist; and the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, etc. were/are more generally Totalitarian.

In all forms the ruling class has used nationalism as a means to divide the international working class. The ruling class encloses areas of state control within imaginary lines (borders), and then uses these borders to try to trick working class people into focusing on some illusionary national identity which obscures class struggle by creating false links between the national ruling class and working class. In this way the ruling class confuses our class, somewhat subverts our global character, gets us to fight amongst ourselves, and even kill one another in their wars.

In the solutions being offered to the problem of globalization, one is the regression to nationalism. The idea being that if we go back to being exploited by a national ruling class, things will somehow be better. In addition to reinforcing capitalism by making use of one of its social relations, this has the effect of restoring the borders within the class. The working class has always been a globalized class in the sense that each member of the working class has more in common with our class siblings world-wide, of all cultures, than we do with those who exploit, oppress, repress, degrade, enslave and insult us.

Another solution has been that we can somehow use the state to our advantage. Not surprisingly, according to both liberals and conservatives should vote for change. Absurd! It amounts to begging the jailers for a nicer jail. They say the state can be reformed (or even that capitalism can be reformed), and use as evidence the relatively minor reforms we've forced the ruling class to give us over the years. However, these reforms exist only as a result of mass protest and direct action, not the ballot box, and usually represent the least radical demands. It also neglects the fact that after these reforms are legally made, they are almost never enforced unless we demand their enforcement as a class. Though, when reforms are enforced, the penalties for the perpetrators (who are, of course, also ruling class) are usually of the sort that makes it cost effective to continue to break the law.

Another solution being offered is to overthrow the capitalist system and replace it with a different capitalist system. The followers of those who created state-controlled capitalism (Totalitarianism) in Russia, China, etc. suggest that we do the same all over the world. They call this "communism" or "socialism", but in reality it is the opposite of communism / socialism in that it is, well, capitalism. Institutionalized hierarchies are one of the hallmarks of class societies; the state is the institutionalized hierarchical form of control for capitalism. By trying to use the state, re-create the state, or use institutionalized hierarchies in any form we reinforce and strengthen capitalism by legitimizing and (re-)creating capitalist social relations.

(5) Imperialism & Empire

Originally, the ruling class was also divided into nations. Strong ruling classes engaged one another in imperialist battles for rulership of regions outside of their borders. In the process, they would weaken and absorb smaller local ruling classes. When the strong ruling classes attacked other strong national ruling classes world wars would explode. World War 1 was fought between two allied groupings of national ruling classes. World War 2 was fought between one more tightly allied ruling class grouping and two loosely allied ruling classes. By the time of the Cold War (which could be thought of as World War 3) it was between two ruling classes, both of which were internationalist in character.

With each world war the bloc of allied ruling classes which included the US and the UK became less and less nationally centered and gradually more internationalist in character. This can be seen in their organizational activities. After WW1, the League of Nations (which eventually became the United Nations) was created to draw the national ruling classes together in one collective voice and will, one global state body. After WW2 two more-or-less competing blocs formed based on which type of capitalism they used. On the free-market side they formed NATO, and on the state-controlled side they formed the Warsaw Pact.

On the NATO side the ruling class agreed, at the meeting at Bretton Woods, on the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), which created the IMF, the World Bank, and (after the fall of the Warsaw Pact) the WTO, the idea being to increase the international flow of capital. This firmly internationalized the ruling class on the NATO side, and begun globalization in earnest. Imperialism, in a proper sense, ended.

With the fall of the Warsaw Pact, the ruling class in these nations was formally integrated into the international ruling class, and the region was opened to the free-market capitalism of the NATO/GATT side of the world. With the recent formal (soon to be official) inclusion of the remaining state-controlled capitalist countries (China, North Korea, etc.) into this fold, one form of capitalism has come out on top, with the international ruling class as the rulers of a global empire, with no center and no national ruling class on top.

Interlude II: The Destruction of the Environment

Capitalism is destroying the planet. The capitalist logic of growth dictates that capitalism must consume and expand or die. For this reason “green capitalism” is a myth. The logic of growth and the logic of responsible use are irreconcilable. We must overthrow capitalism and its destructive consumptionism and learn how to use resources responsibly, or we will perish.

This is because we are part of nature. We are materially interdependent with the rest of the planet. One of the most dangerous aspects of class society is that along with its other alienations comes human alienation from the rest of nature. In order to pursue a path of consumption, the ruling class has to blind us (and perhaps itself) to the fact that such consumption makes the environment unable to sustain human life.

SOME IDEAS ON WHAT TO DO ABOUT CAPITALISM

Revolution and Reforms vs. Reformism

So basically, in order for us to even begin to be free we must destroy capitalism in its entirety: classes, the market, the state, money, exchange, wage systems, borders, racism, sexism, homophobia and the destruction of the environment all have to go. We can't permanently reform capitalism, and we can't build a different capitalism on the state-controlled / Leninist model.

So how the hell are we supposed to do this? And what do we do until this glorious day when capitalism is smashed?

We must expand the floor of our cage in ways that openly conflict with the ruling class, and thus open up greater possibilities for the destruction of capitalism. History shows us we can force breathing room for ourselves, and we must.

We should use organizational forms and methods which themselves contradict capitalism. That is, non-hierarchical, grassroots, organic organizational forms that subvert the attempts made by the ruling class to strengthen our reliance on institutionalized leadership and hierarchies. Such attempts by the ruling class include voting.

We should use direct action, individually and collectively, instead of relying on people to do things for us. We should demand autonomy, not beg. We should take everything we want, not wait to be given. We should force open liberating possibilities, not hope for change.

We should work to find ways to overcome exchange as much as possible, whenever possible. We should instead work to build mutual aid in our communities by creating sharing programs that make resources free and available to all.

Most importantly, we should avoid allowing reforms to become ends in and of themselves. We have to understand that reforms only exist because we fight for them, and not because the ruling class wants us to have them. In fact, the ruling class, in order to preserve its power and in order to maintain the growth that capitalism requires, must strip us of anything that gives us power. Thus, reforms are, at best, temporary, which history has shown repeatedly. Reforms provide us with breathing space that we can use to widen and strengthen our movement to destroy capitalism. They are nothing more than that, and if we don't take advantage of them, we will find ourselves set back, as we have been many times when we see reforms as ends instead of means. When reforms become ends, when we use capitalist means of opening breathing spaces (such as voting, mediators and hierarchical organizational forms), we create reformism. Reformism strengthens capitalism by maintaining the illusion that capitalism can be "permanently reformed to meet our needs". Reformism doesn't understand that globalization is the natural movement of capitalism. Reformism doesn't understand that capitalism is class struggle, and thus inequality cannot be ended save through the movement to end capitalism — in capitalism's final destruction.

Openly contradicting capitalism while working for reforms strengthens the working class movement toward community, strengthens and realizes our desires to be more than "workers in the capitalist machine" and in these ways opens up the possibility of ending capitalism. That is: these ways strengthen and open up revolutionary possibilities.

SOME SPECIFICS

Mass Protest

Since Seattle, mass protest has seemingly returned with a vengeance. Every few months somewhere there is a relatively large-scale protest. Unfortunately, many of these protests hang on to the notion of being “symbolic”, of making symbolic stands against something instead of concretely attacking it.

Mass protest can have but two main purposes: (1) to directly and concretely stop something from happening, and (2) to inform others about what needs to be stopped. These are both concrete only in as much as “2” leads to “1” and “1” succeeds on some level. If “1” succeeds it will naturally reinforce “2”.

In order for concrete attacks to succeed, a diversity of tactics must be encouraged. Shouting slogans, doing civil disobedience, destroying property, fighting with cops and much else all has its place in our tactical repertoire since all can be necessary for success.

For mass protest to succeed, we have to stop worrying about the corporate media, and how they will portray us and what we do. We get only two kinds of press: no press and bad press. It doesn’t matter what we do, if they are not ignoring us they are attempting to make us look crazy, stupid and bad. So the best plan is to force them to report that we have succeeded in shutting down another meeting, or succeeding in winning our strike demands, or succeeded in stopping Neiman-Marcus from selling fur, or chased the Klan out of town, or whatnot.

It is important to realize that mass protest is a way of fighting for reforms until the point when it turns into an insurrection. Until then, it doesn’t matter if you are holding a sign or throwing a brick through a Starbucks window or fighting with cops, it is reformist in nature. Attacking, and even defeating, parts of the capitalist system (such as a single corporation, or a single state, or a single global entity such as the WTO) is not equivalent to attacking the system as a whole. We can only attack the system as a whole by working to overcome capitalist social relations in our everyday lives, and from that basis attack the parts of the capitalist system. And, again, the best way to do this is in ways that contradict capitalism: non-hierarchically, directly, using mutual aid instead of exchange as much as possible.

The most important aspect of mass protest, however, is that part which is more-or-less imperceivable to people who are not there. This is the links which are formed, individually and collectively, by the people who participate. These links enable wider solidarity through wider personal communication, and are galvanized by the success of collective action.

Dual Power

Mass protest means nothing if we are not “forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old”, if we are not creating bases of power in our communities from which to confront the ruling class and their capitalist system, and which are as autonomous as possible from capitalism. This is known as creating Dual Power. “Dual” because our structures of power exist beside and against the ruling class’ structures of power.

To do this, we need to take the participatory decision-making, solidarity, respect and encouragement of all kinds of diversity and mutual aid that are being used on the streets and find ways to apply them to our everyday lives. We should find ways of applying them in our homes, workplaces, neighborhoods, schools, and in all of our relationships and interactions.

We can create autonomous community centers in which we can hang out, have meetings, stage cultural events, host speakers, run soup kitchens, organize buying and eating co-ops, organize knowledge and skill shares, play games — the possibilities are endless.

We can build autonomous groups in our workplaces to discuss our problems, come up with solutions and implement them. We can also do this in our neighborhoods by forming autonomous coalitions and assemblies.

And so on. From there we must then find ways of linking our autonomous groupings and centers in our cities, regions and ultimately the world.

Some possibilities of these ideas working can be found in the ongoing Zapatista Revolt in Chiapas, Mexico, the directly democratic General Assemblies and Councils used in most 20th Century revolutions (before they were co-opted or destroyed by groups like the Bolsheviks in Russia) and the farming collectives created by peasants during the Spanish Civil War.

Discussion, Propaganda and DIY Media

One of the most important aspects of confronting capitalism is to openly propagate ideas and be willing to discuss them. We cannot be afraid of stating and defending our positions, but we also cannot be afraid to refine and develop our ideas through listening to others and honestly considering their ideas.

We also have to develop means of getting ideas and news that isn't reported by the corporate media out to as many people as possible. To this end, we need to create autonomous media sources.

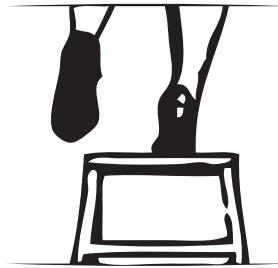
The Independent Media Centers (IMCs) are a great start. However, we also have to develop means of getting hardcopies of such news into people's hands, especially into the hands of those with no access to the net or who would not stumble on the websites. In this we also have to be careful not to let one autonomous media source be the only voice we hear. We should start our own neighborhood, city and/or regional newsheets and papers, pirate radio stations and television (cable access, perhaps) shows. We can advertise these with flyer and poster, and in one another's initiatives.

The hardcore-punk music scene has created a global, counter-cultural Do-It-Yourself (DIY) network that is autonomous from many aspects of capitalism. With it they communicate, travel / tour, self-release and distribute records, books and 'zines and do a myriad of other things. We should take their example and use it in our initiatives. It can be applied to other sub-cultural scenes, to the publishing and distribution of our own literature and such, to the sharing of resources and possibilities and much else.

THE END?

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